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“THE BEST LAID SCHEMES . . . ”

Also by
BARBARA GOOLDEN

**THE WIND MY POSTHORSE
MORNING TELLS THE DAY
WITHIN A DREAM
YOUNG AMBITION
CALL THE TUNE
THE ASSES BRIDGE
CROWN OF LIFE**

"THE BEST LAID SCHEMES . . ."

BY

BARBARA GOOLDEN



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This simple story is dedicated, without
apology, to those who think they know better.

"BENEDICT," observed Mr. Daleham, "takes himself very seriously."

"Bless him!"

"Yes," he returned doubtfully. "Yes, of course, though I'm not altogether sure that it's a good thing to encourage."

The second Mrs. Daleham was privately of his opinion, and, if the truth be known, a good deal scared of becoming Benedict's stepmother. But, at the same time, she was thoroughly diverted at the prospect, and on the whole her optimism got the better of her fear. "We mustn't alarm ourselves," she said. "I daresay all the children are suffering from growing pains in one way or another, poor things. I remember that I found them uncommonly painful myself."

Her husband looked relieved: he took her hand, squeezed it gratefully and said: "You must have been a perfectly charming little girl."

"Nonsense," said Rosita happily. She was vaguely aware that she spoke with truth, but because she was at the end of her honeymoon and conscious of extreme well-being, even in an overheated French railway carriage, she was filled with a serenity which the past was powerless to loosen. Yet, although memory was thrust so determinedly to the back of her mind, she could not altogether escape from its authoritative pricks.

And, leaning against Godfrey Daleham's shoulder, she recalled a childhood made solitary by a complete failure to conform to pattern. Always she had been made conscious of her own shortcomings: always been reproved for being 'different'.

"The child's a fool," declared her grandmother, that handsome, short-tempered old lady who liked to play at cards all day, and to dine out every night.

"She certainly doesn't take after me!" declared Rosita's well-dressed, boisterous father, who was a Q.C., and as much in love with the world as his mother.

And both of them would look down at the small, silent little girl as if she really owed them an apology. Perhaps they felt that she did. The plain truth was that she had refused to admire them, and the fact was unfortunately evident. No one regretted her odd taste more than herself, yet she had been unable to adapt it. Honesty compelled her to stand apart, even while envy possessed her, as she watched her brother Julian succeeding where she so lamentably failed.

Pressed close to Godfrey's shoulder, Rosita remembered all the strain and difficulty of those early years and pitied the little ghost girl of the shadowy past. If only they had taken some pains to understand her! If only her mother had not died when she was born, and left her to do unequal battle alone!

"Tired, dearest?" asked Godfrey as Rosita sighed.

She shook her head with a smile. She had been day-dreaming again. And at once the delightful reflection came over her that never more could she be blamed for the fact. At last, at long last, she had escaped! Undoubtedly she had taken her time about it. Not that it was her fault. The desire for liberty had always been with her, but not the means to exercise it. She had lived behind closed doors. Her manner of life was chosen for her. Once or twice her grandmother had made some effort to arrange what she elected to call a suitable match, but the attempt had met with undeniable failure. It was obvious that Rosita was not even trying.

It was the last straw. Rosita's grandmother took to her

bed and presently died. It was not a tactful moment to have chosen. The Great War was barely over, Julian was on the point of demobilisation, and his father had just failed to become a judge. It was, therefore, the nineteen-year-old Rosita's business to restore harmony to an unsettled house.

And for the next twenty years that was her rôle. It was not until the death of her father, and her brother's subsequent marriage, that she was startled into finding herself no longer young and with her own life still to lead.

She was, in fact, in this somewhat parlous condition when she met Godfrey Daleham. He had recently resigned an academic appointment in South America, and come home to England with his children.

The first Mrs. Daleham, who had died two years previously, had been Portuguese and possessed of a great deal of temperament. Her husband had, indeed, been considerably exhausted by her. History had been his first love, and there were occasions when he wished that it had been his only devotion. Certainly the combination of Henrietta Daleham and University life had been distinctly difficult, and it was an unfortunate fact that Godfrey presently found himself supporting the lot of a widower more easily than that of a husband.

But only for a time: he soon became aware that he had obligations, four of them, and that the governesses and tutors whom he employed were constantly giving him notice. They said, not that the children were difficult, but that the responsibility was too great, it was impossible for them to decide everything.

Reluctantly Godfrey had torn himself away from the enchanting spectacle of England under Canute—for now that he was relieved of pedagogy he had ambitions to become a light historian—and turned to his domestic affairs.

They were, he observed, in some disorder. His elder sons were discontented, his daughter restless, his youngest

boy unwell. It was palpable that they needed a mother. Godfrey experienced dismay, but he was an unselfish little man and he was quite prepared to believe that Aldous, Benedict, Marina and Hugh were more important than Canute.

He therefore took himself off for a short holiday to London. There he renewed acquaintance with old friends, attended University gatherings, musical parties and literary luncheons. He found such activities extremely depressing, but he had great hopes of discovering a wife in such an excellent atmosphere.

In appearance Godfrey Daleham was more agreeable than impressive, being rather short and possessed of a big scholarly head with a great deal of front to it. His eyes were large and mild, his long, thin mouth a little shy, and his expression, by a very slight effort, whimsical. In brief, he was a pleasant-looking person and his slow smile, his unhurried movements, and reassuring voice were all of a kind to attract as charmingly diffident a woman as Rosita.

He found her, a little unexpectedly, in a Bloomsbury drawing-room. Observing that she was the only person present, apart from himself, not occupied in making a great deal of noise, he immediately regarded her as a most delightful refuge and sat down at once by her side.

On the following Sunday afternoon he found himself taking her to the Queen's Hall concert. On Tuesday they visited a picture gallery together, and on Friday, over the tea-cups, beneath a striped umbrella in Kensington Gardens, he asked her to marry him.

And now here she was, seated at his side, after three weeks' honeymoon in Paris. He was conscious of being extremely grateful to her. He was fifty-five, and, thanks to the excellence of her tact, he felt neither ridiculously young nor unpleasantly elderly.

And, squeezing her hand once more, he stole a sidelong

glance at her. Yes! Even four hours of steam heat, and a lengthy luncheon, had detracted nothing from her charm. He was captivated by her soft yet lively expression, her clear, slightly surprised hazel eyes, her delicate colour, and soft mop of curling grey hair. The pursuit of history did not in any way diminish Godfrey's æsthetic taste, and Rosita's slender grace, her admirable clothes, and air of quiet amusement delighted him. For a woman of forty she was in the highest degree satisfactory.

It was a blessing, he reflected, that she had not been snapped up before. She was amusing and good-tempered, and she had—heaven be praised—no temperament!

"What's the joke?" he asked fondly. "Why are you smiling?"

She looked surprised. "Was I smiling? I didn't know it. Anyhow, it is because I am so happy. I'm not used to it, you see. Never before have I enjoyed myself in my own way, and it's most refreshing. Poor Father, of course, did his best for me, but he was so fond of rank and fashion himself that he simply hadn't any sympathy for people whose tastes differed from his own."

Godfrey subdued an impulse to say something very uncomplimentary about 'poor Father'. "But your brother," he said, "surely he understood you?"

Rosita opened her eyes very wide. "Julian? Dear me, no! I bored him extremely. And, I must admit, with reason. He was always such a success and so much in demand! Naturally he hadn't much time for me. Of course, sometimes he was sweet. He used to say if I dyed my hair it would take years off my age. But somehow I like it as it is."

"I should enjoy," remarked Godfrey, "kicking Julian good and very hard. I have had a great deal to do with successful young men, or young men on the road to success, and it's my firm belief that they are all the better for frequent

kicking." His mild voice was full of exasperation. "Your beautiful hair," he added indignantly.

"Darling!" whispered Rosita. She couldn't help herself. Here they were, hurrying towards Boulogne, about to cross a Channel which would probably be choppy, and later face the criticism of the children. But nothing could spoil this moment. Here was warm proof of being loved, for was not her husband declaring her hair to be beautiful and—even better—expressing himself ready to kick Julian? She could hardly believe it! She might say what she liked and it would be approved. Her father had told her that sentiment was out of date, and her brother had said that enthusiasm killed charm, but Godfrey never seemed to find her stupid, and he always listened attentively to what she said—just as if it was worth hearing.

Quickly she turned her head and stared out at the flat French landscape. It would never do for Godfrey to see that she had tears in her eyes.

But for his part he was comfortably savouring that 'darling'. The first Mrs. Daleham had never said it warmly and comfortably like that. Henrietta had been volcanic. He blinked as he remembered the many storms to which she had subjected him.

And, looking at the clear outline of Rosita's profile against the window-pane, he remarked: "You say you are not used to happiness; well, neither am I. We shall have to teach each other."

And because there was no one else in the carriage he kissed her. Godfrey had quite forgotten that he had married in order to provide a mother for his children: he recollected nothing of Canute: sitting there, a small man, in a large overcoat with a copy of *Le Temps* in one pocket and the *Continental Daily Mail* in the other, he kissed Rosita rapturously.

"I am sure," he exclaimed, "that we shall have a smooth crossing."

And since optimism was, under the circumstances, infectious, she agreed with him. The wind that met them on the quay at Boulogne could not daunt their determined smiles, and if those smiles grew a little fixed as the crossing proceeded, at least they did not disappear.

At Folkestone, Godfrey and Rosita went down the gangway in triumph: the untoward not having occurred, they were pardonably pleased with themselves.

Climbing into the hired car they set off for the last part of the journey with light hearts. In two hours' time they would be home.

The realization, coming a little belatedly to Godfrey, shook him. From then on he would have to share Rosita with the children. It made him feel rather chilly, and, thrusting his arm within hers, he said: "You mustn't let Marina and the others monopolise you, you know."

Rosita controlled a sudden and most reprehensible desire to sing, loudly, possibly untunefully, then and there, in that extremely ill-balanced car. She, who had never been really necessary, was going to be necessary to five people all at once. The children would need her, Godfrey would need her, and no one would look at her as though, without any conceivable doubt, she would make a fool of herself.

"I," said Mr. Daleham a little urgently because she had not replied to his remark, "must come first."

"But of *course*," replied Rosita, feeling quite sorry for him. "Of *course*."

BENEDICT swung the garden gate behind him and strolled into the orchard. Here among the grey twisted limbs of the apple-trees, the bare, outflung arms of the damson, the thick spine of the plum, he could be agreeably melancholy.

He liked his first experience of an English autumn: the smell of smouldering bonfires and charred wood mingled with the scent of pine; the wind had a quick, destructive touch and ruthlessly stripped the tattered beech-trees of their last clinging leaves.

The grass was wet beneath Benedict's feet and he trod in it a little self-consciously, for he was nineteen and on the way to becoming a poet. He had produced nothing so far, but his first term at Oxford had convinced him that he had only to try. Poetry and politics struggled for first place in his imagination, and the obvious solution seemed to be to combine the two. Other people had done it successfully, so why not Benedict?

Gravely he walked over the grass, a thin, untidy young man, with a shock of dark hair, and a well-shaped, sallow face, in which a pair of admirable grey eyes regarded the world with youthful scorn.

'I shall explain to Rosita,' he was thinking, 'what an entire waste of time it is for me to remain at Oxford. She will make Father see the absurdity of it. I've simply *got* to have leisure to write. I don't mind starting on journalism.' Which was kind of Benedict. 'The point is that at the moment I'm stagnating: and I can't afford to do that. I mean it isn't giving me a chance. No one could write poetry under the circumstances.' And, a little hastily, he did his best to forget the odd poet or two who had overcome the crippling disability of a University education.

'Father,' mused Benedict, as he sank his shabby shoes into the soft grass, 'Father has a pathetic belief in academic attainments. Rosita must try to get him out of it. To listen to him one would suppose that a fellow was sent to school in order to enable him to pass examinations. Which is ridiculous. One is sent for the sake of learning to get on with one's contemporaries, and the shortest cut to that is an enthusiasm for violent games. So much at least Oxford has

taught me, and, incidentally, shown me what I've missed. If we hadn't lived in outlandish places I might have succeeded in conforming to type—at least outwardly. As it is, I seem to be pretty much of a misfit.'

But Benedict regarded his own shortcomings with a sort of moody complacency. He felt that unpopularity suited him, and, indeed, became a budding verse-maker. This philosophy did not, however, cure him of a sense of grievance. He was too often uncomfortable not to affix blame somewhere. And his resentment centred itself almost inevitably on his father. He was fond of Godfrey, but he could not forgive him for an unconventional upbringing.

"My unhappiness," Benedict had long ago decided, "turned me inevitably into a poet." And sometimes he would add: "Like Shelley."

It was perhaps a little hard on him that he should have been compelled to spend the first ten years of his life in China, during Mr. Daleham's academic engagements in that country. For no sooner had Benedict awoken a little to the fact that the cultured Confucian was the most civilised person in the world, and that there was idealism here in the discovery of which a whole lifetime might be spent, than suddenly his father accepted a more lucrative appointment in another continent, and the whole family was whisked off to South America.

Benedict was an intelligent little boy and he thought the exchange a mistake. He did not want sophistication, languor, or hot beaches: he wanted the special smells, and mysteries, and sensation of unhurried centuries which he had dimly apprehended in the country of his birth.

Once again tutors and governesses were exported from England: there was no talk of schools. Mrs. Daleham refused passionately to be parted from her children, and Mr. Daleham, with a mild but equal firmness, expressed a preference for having them taught at home.

Benedict came to the end of the orchard, and stood leaning against the fence which separated it from the paddock.

"They ought to have sent me Home," he muttered. "I believe Father sees that now. He's determined not to make the same mistake with Hugh. And the little beggar won't realise his good luck. However, that's his affair. What's more relevant is that I must make Rosita see my point of view, late in the day though it is."

Watching the white autumn haze shifting about the rim of hedge hiding the frosty road, he saw Aldous, his elder brother, come through the latchet gate.

"What's he want to come round by the paddock for?" wondered Benedict. "He'll only get tired." And, stepping over the fence, he went to meet Aldous, who was making poor headway with his rubber-tipped stick across the grass.

"Why all the exercise?" called Benedict.

"Good practice for me." The eldest of the young Dalehams was a thick-set, chubby-faced young man with a very amiable expression, and a club foot. In contrast to his brother he was neatly dressed, and under one arm he carried a sketch-book. It was obvious that he was tired: his fresh complexion had a heightened colour and there were beads of perspiration on his upper lip, while the hand which rested on the stick trembled a little.

Benedict felt an angry sympathy. He hated Aldous to suffer; indeed, he sometimes thought that he was more sensitive to his brother's pain than the victim himself.

"Why on earth you do it I can't think," he grumbled.

"I'm all right," said Aldous shortly. There was admirable understanding between these two, and a somewhat unusual capacity for mutual self-revelation. Benedict knew perfectly well that Aldous' manful attempts to overcome his infirmity were increased in the stimulating air of the English countryside. Abroad he had done his best, and while he had been

the only member of the family to keep a high average of good health, both in China and South America, his love of walking had never before been gratified by cool, straight roads, between miles of gorseland, under a kind grey heaven.

Aldous' enthusiasm for his mother country was unquenchable. It was his pride that he had been born in England a few months before his father took the lamentable step of leaving a Midland University for a seat of learning abroad. At any rate, Aldous considered it lamentable. He was sorry for his brother, Benedict, who had been born the following year beneath a foreign sky. It was, in Aldous' opinion, a misfortune. And when, ten years later, the elder boy was sent home to visit London specialists, he was more than a little reluctant to leave the island to which he so obviously belonged.

"It would be better," he had assured his father, "if we all came Home. I would like to go to a public school. Byron went to Harrow and he had a club foot."

But Godfrey Daleham's lot had been cast elsewhere, and, being a domesticated as well as a very obstinate man, he had taken his family with him.

Aldous bore no resentment against his father: he saw that it was all very difficult. But always he had cherished the hope of coming Home. And now it had happened. He was twenty, too old, alas! to go to the University, but at least he was in his own country and free to exercise his own ambitions. At least he hoped he *was* free. He had decided that he must have a good talk to Rosita. Women were always more imaginative than men: she would be able to make his father understand how very definitely his mind was made up.

Benedict held out his hand for the sketch-book. "May I see?"

Aldous relinquished it. "Nothing much: only the little mill-pond and the meadow beyond."

The other paused to stare at the drawing. It struck him as being uncommonly good. It had delicacy, and strength, and a rare economy. And Benedict sighed. Why had this admirable talent gone to Aldous, who thought so little of it? The fellow didn't want to be an artist: he wanted to run a chicken farm. 'My poetry,' thought Benedict honestly, 'isn't a patch on his drawing.' And he said: "You ought to make a water-colour of this."

"Yes," said Aldous, indifferently, "I might, some time." Adding, with a genuine gratitude: "I'm glad you like it." He too wished the younger brother had inherited this particular gift from their artistic mother: Benedict seemed to have claimed a good deal else from her, the dark good looks, the slender frame, the air of smouldering resentment. But he lacked her grace and her passionate temperament. Privately Aldous was of the opinion that it was a good thing. He had been fond of his mother, but no one could have called her a comfortable woman, not even her amiable eldest son.

Aldous, who took after his father's people, considered that the other children, who all resembled Henrietta, were infinitely superior in charm to himself. Nevertheless, he was quite content to be mediocre. Because, after all, it was an English mediocrity, and he preferred its flavour to even the best varieties produced by other countries.

"What time are they supposed to be arriving?" asked Benedict, as the brothers approached the house.

"About four or thereabouts. I hope to goodness Rosita won't find our arrangements very sketchy."

"Why should she? Everything seems to me extremely comfortable."

"Women look at things differently," declared Aldous. "They like meals to be punctual, and everyone to be at table before they start carving."

"Carving?"

"English lamb," said the other firmly, "and joints of roast beef."

Benedict blinked. "Well, it'll be a novelty for us, anyhow. But I suppose Father will carve."

"He's had no experience. However, perhaps she'll teach him."

"I doubt it. Anyhow, I shouldn't feel anxious about the house, if I were you. After all, Marina is a woman. She must know what her sex likes."

"She can't know much about Englishwomen. Besides, one can hardly call her grown-up. She's not seventeen."

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," said Benedict, "to find that Marina was a good deal more grown-up than her stepmother."

They had climbed the winding gravel path to the loggia. Here, cross-legged upon a cushion on the ground, was a thin, olive-skinned little boy, deep in a book. Raising his eyes as his brothers approached, he observed them without enthusiasm.

"Marina has gone upstairs," he announced, "to get ready for the honeymooners."

"I hope she's going to take that filthy stuff off her nails," said Aldous, sinking down into a chair and dropping his sketch-book on the table. "I can't think what she wants to do it for."

"All women use it," replied Benedict, lounging against the balustrade. "It's merely the revival of an ancient custom. It'll be nose-rings next. I think Marina would look rather well with a nose-ring."

"I don't want Rosita to start off by thinking her bad form," said Aldous anxiously.

Hugh's large eyes fixed themselves upon him with extreme melancholy. "She's bound to think us *all* bad form," he remarked. "You because you are a painter—the English always despise artists; Benedict because he's an

anarchist; Marina because she's a coquette, and I because I am . . ."

"A precocious little brute," finished Benedict. "You seem to forget, incidentally, that we are English ourselves. Besides, it's all nonsense; we don't despise artists at all. We are very kind to them as long as they keep the rules, and no one seeing Aldous' work could ever doubt that he would do anything else. Five years from now he will be hung on the line at the Royal Academy. As for me, I am not an anarchist: I am . . ." he was about to say "a poet," and checked himself. "I am an Independent Socialist," he amended, "and Marina is no more of a flirt than any other woman of her age and appearance. My impression is that Rosita will take us all to her heart."

"I," said Hugh grandly, "do not wish to be taken to Rosita's heart at all." All the same he was privately determined to have a word with his stepmother. This plan of sending him to a public school next term did not at all meet with Hugh's approval. He was as shy as he was precocious, and he liked to be allowed to roam about with a book under his arm, and his own thoughts for company. He did not know how to play games, nor how to talk to his own contemporaries. It seemed to him terrible that at thirteen he should, for the first time in his life, be wrenched away from his family and thrust among hearty barbarians. He had courage, but it was not social courage: it was the bravery of a young, questing mind which found its adventures in solitude.

Of the four children he was the only one who dreaded the coming of Rosita. He felt that she was bound to interfere with his independence. Yet he thought that he could forgive her anything if only she could persuade his father not to send him away to school.

"You might go and brush yourself up a bit," suggested Aldous. "They ought to be here within the next half-hour."

"They must take me as they find me," replied little Hugh, returning to his book. "I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks."

The elder brothers exchanged glances. It was their habit to indulge this small, delicate creature, but they felt that Rosita was entitled to a little respect.

"Willy-nilly," said Benedict, "we are changing our mode of life. Even I am going to make myself look like an immaculate bank-clerk. I had meant to get my hair cut specially for the purpose, only I forgot."

"Never mind," said a high, young voice behind them, "in spite of all your efforts, I'm bound to eclipse the lot of you, so why trouble?"

Aldous turned in his chair to look critically at Marina. She had certainly made the best of herself, and once again, almost against his will, he felt proud of her. It was not as if she were really pretty.

She was very small, with tiny feet and hands, of which she was naively proud. Her skin was brown, and her slender frame still childishly formed. Large, curiously light grey eyes sparkled in the round, dark face framed with thick curly hair. She had a little snub nose and a wide, impulsive mouth.

There was no regularity about her face, and none of the austerity which lent Benedict so attractive an air. Nor, again, had Marina the charm of Hugh's wistful delicacy. She had instead a generous, unrepentant gaiety. The dimple, which danced in her left cheek, invited laughter as ready as her own; her white teeth seemed to ask for smiles equally radiant. It was difficult to look at Marina and not be captivated, even though her brothers sometimes called her Monkeyface.

To-day she had put on her linen-coloured frock with the Swiss embroidery and the scarlet belt. To this she had added her cornelian beads and ear-rings.

Aldous felt a bit doubtful about those ear-rings. He thought that a schoolgirl home from Cheltenham for the holidays would never have worn them, and he very much wanted Marina to look like that kind of girl. He was just about to ask her whether she need wear quite so much jewellery when, to his relief, Benedict said it for him.

"My dear boy," replied Marina, "this is an occasion!"

"Which is precisely why," explained Hugh, "we would rather you looked a little less bedizened."

"Nonsense," said Aldous hastily. "Marina looks extremely nice. It's simply that ear-rings seem, anyhow to me, to be slightly unnecessary."

"If one only wore what was necessary," explained Marina, "one would be indecent." She sat herself down beside Aldous and added: "These good people are rather late, aren't they?"

"They're not due yet."

A fat spaniel ambled up the steps of the loggia, and flopped down at their feet to rest. He was Godfrey's dog, and, having withstood two seasons of hot weather in South America, was thankful to find himself in the cool, rabbit-infested country of England.

Benedict prodded the fat side gently with his toe. "This chap will be pleased to see Father again."

"He won't like being turned out of Father's room," said Marina.

"Why should he be?" demanded Hugh. "Rosita will have to put up with his snores. Punchinello will never sleep anywhere else without complaining, loudly and inconsiderately, all night."

"She may not care for dogs," said Aldous.

"All Englishwomen love dogs," declared Benedict. "She's probably got two or three of her own. I agree with Hugh, we can't possibly have her upsetting the whole house by turning Punch out of the room."

"Well," said Marina, "I'm not so sure. I think we had better try putting his basket in the passage."

Punchinello opened one warm brown eye and looked at her: his feathery tail flapped languidly. He was not bothering about those voices going on above his head. He was too tired and too comfortable: to-night he would sleep soundly—in the middle of master's bed. Unless, of course, master came home again: in which case he would sleep at the bottom of it, snugly, with his chin resting firmly on those familiar feet.

Marina had opened Aldous' sketch-book and was looking at the drawing of the mill-pond. "You get better and better," she said. "When you go to the art school in London they'll have nothing to teach you."

Aldous flushed: he looked hot and put out. "I am not going to the art school in London," he said.

"Not? But I thought it was arranged?"

"I'm going to speak to Father again. It's a great waste of time." He mumbled, floundered and stopped. The others were silent with sympathy. They understood exactly what he meant. It was not their father to whom he would talk, but Rosita.

'So shall I,' thought Marina. 'I shall tell her how important it is that I should join a dramatic school and be properly trained for the stage. She must make Father let *me* go to London. I shall have to persuade her that I really am some good. If she won't believe me, at least she'll believe Mr. Temple.'

And she sat quite still with happiness. Her friendship with Wynnington Temple was such an unbelievably joyous thing. Surely Rosita would listen to one of the greatest actors of the day! It was all nonsense for Godfrey to say there were no great actors left. Had she not been to London to see Wynnington act, and had he not lent her his book of Press cuttings? Why, people looked over the hedge in order

to watch the great man walk in his garden, and Mrs. Temple had to make excuses to turn inquisitive visitors away!

Wynnington even had to employ a special secretary to deal with his fan mail. He prided himself that he never left a letter unanswered: no wonder he was so popular! The public adored him. He still played romantic parts, although he was grown a little fat and heavy. But his thick grey hair, his Napoleonic profile, his golden voice continued to delight the stalls and the boxes, though they sometimes made the pit and the circle giggle.

Wynnington Temple was a legend. They said he had once been a call-boy. And, some said, a stage carpenter. Anyhow, his beginnings were agreeably wrapped in mystery. But presently he appeared in operettas, and sang very manly songs, attired in tight and becoming uniforms.

Having acquired the right friends he soon made his appearance in straight comedy and, being industrious, in more ways than one, he strode the path to success.

Marina had met him at a garden party in the early summer, and had fallen an immediate victim to that outrageous charm. Mr. Temple had an irresistible blend of flattery and affectionate bullying. He petted Marina and amused himself by trying to tame her independent spirit. He even heard her recite and told her that she had some talent: if she worked, he said, and was prepared to endure hardship, poverty and disillusionment, she might possibly make a success of a stage career.

Marina was prepared to endure anything. She sat at Mrs. Temple's tea-table, with her soft gaze fixed upon Mr. Temple's large pale face, drinking in everything he said. And the actor was an indefatigable conversationalist. His weather-beaten, untidy little wife, who had heard a good deal of it all before, watched Marina's rapt face with a queer expression in her shrewd eyes. One might almost have supposed that she was sorry for this ardent little

stage-struck girl, with the ringing, infectious laugh and the quick, pretty hands.

"Aldous," said Marina, when the other two had gone into the house, "I do feel that everything is going to be lovely now, don't you?"

"I hope so, I'm sure."

"Oh dear!" she sighed. "Why are you always so careful? You will never have any fun, Aldous darling, if you are always so careful."

"Well," he said, reasonably enough, "we don't know, do we? It's years since we had a woman to look after us. Poor Mother was always too much of an invalid to——"

"To take us seriously," interrupted Marina. "I know. We've been important to no one but ourselves since we've been grown-up."

"I don't think that's quite fair on Father. He feels his responsibilities . . ."

"But not ours. That's the point. He knows what he thinks is good for us. He imagines, for example, that all I need to do is to stay at home, playing second fiddle to Rosita, until such time as a nice young man of impeccable county family makes me an offer of marriage."

"You might do worse," said Aldous.

"I doubt it." Marina's eyes were dancing. "Why, I would rather go into a convent."

"I don't think convents," he replied dryly, "are much in your line."

"Neither do I. But there are alternatives, Aldous. And the stage is one."

He looked dubious. An actress? Of course there *were* actresses who were 'good form', but was it quite the profession for Marina?

"I suppose," he said, "that fellow Temple has put this into your head."

"It was there before, darling."

"I don't like that chap," said Aldous. "They say he's got a bit of a reputation."

"He has. He's the best actor in London."

"That wasn't what I meant."

"Oh well," said Marina largely, "it's different if you're famous. People run after him. I don't see that it's his fault."

Aldous looked at her and hesitated. There were things he could have told her, but was it his place? The young Dalehams disliked interfering with each other's liberty. But Marina, with all her heedlessness, her apparent sophistication, was really very young. Ought he not perhaps to utter a word of warning? But, while he hesitated, there came the sound of a motor horn from the front of the house.

Marina leapt from her chair. "Come on!" she commanded. "They've arrived!"

3

ROSITA, seated before the tea-tray, conscious of four pairs of eyes all considerably averted from her, was aware of both embarrassment and delight. Surely these were entirely charming children? Aldous' expression, Benedict's good looks, Marina's fascination, Hugh's charm—nothing escaped her. And she glanced at Godfrey with affectionate pride. Really, he had done his job very well. When they were alone she would have to reassure him: she was sure that there was nothing for him to worry about.

The large drawing-room, with its low ceiling and long windows, made her want to laugh. Bless their hearts, it was all wrong! With the English scene for background, what did they want with lacquer cabinets, prayer-mats, Chinese prints, Spanish shawls, and carved armchairs? It was very natural that Godfrey, on his travels, should have been

acquisitive, but he would have to learn to like floral cordon, water-colours and equivalent ornaments.

'My Dresden shepherdesses, for example,' thought Rosita. 'Also my dear little Coalport casket. As for pictures, I think we might at least hang my David Cox above the mantelpiece.' It was nice to think that she could start doing something for the children almost immediately. Background was *such* a help!

"And how did you amuse yourselves in Paris?" Benedict was asking. His tone was indulgent and kindly.

Rosita replied that they had gone everywhere. "One afternoon," she said, "we drove to St. Germain-en-Laye, and had tea on the terrace of the Pavillon Henri Quatre."

"It's better to dine there," said Marina. "We did, on the journey home last time. We saw the moon rise above the Sacré Cœur, and presently all the lights of Paris began to twinkle. It was the most romantic thing in the world."

"When one is on one's honeymoon," announced Hugh, "romance is unnecessary." He looked at Rosita, and added: "Marina is very sentimental."

"Did you go to the Ballet?" asked Aldous. He seemed flushed and a little anxious, as though he were afraid that they were not making things easy for Rosita.

Perhaps Godfrey was aware of the same thing, for he said, a trifle curtly: "Why this catechism? Tell us instead what has been going on here."

"No one knows better than yourself," said Hugh, "that nothing ever goes on here. We live a peaceful and untroubled existence."

Rosita laughed outright. "How delightful," she exclaimed. "I cannot imagine anything nicer."

Marina gazed at her with dancing eyes. "You can't be serious? But of course it isn't true. All sorts of things happen here if you give them the chance."

"In spite of that," said Benedict, "the atmosphere is

mid-Victorian—enlivened by not the faintest breath of Liberalism. Incidentally," he added, finding the opportunity too inviting to resist, "I'm a Socialist myself."

"What fun," said Rosita. "I used to be one, years ago."

Godfrey smiled at her. "We all are—in the impulsive generosity of our youth. Benedict will outgrow it with the rest."

"God forbid!" said Benedict. "If I may ask, what are you now, Rosita?"

"My dear," she said frankly, "I'm not sure that I know. I vote for the Government, if that's any help."

"It's ample," he returned grimly, and fell silent.

Godfrey looked amused, and Aldous said: "The only news *I've* heard of, since you were away, is that Mr. Temple is thinking of writing his reminiscences.

"Wynnington Temple?" demanded his father. "What in the world does he want to do that for?"

"Posterity," began Marina, and grew pale with rage at the boys' shout of derision. "There's no need to make so much noise," she went on, her fresh voice trembling and shrill. "It is possible, I suppose, to be a member of the theatrical world and yet to be capable of writing pure English and making . . ."

"A serious contribution to literature?" Godfrey shook his head. "No, Marina, I think not. Mr. Temple is an excellent actor, but I am afraid he has no claim to scholarship. What do you think of him, by the way, Rosita? I suppose you often saw him in London?"

"I don't think I ever missed a play he was in. And he never disappointed me. I thought him irresistible."

Marina was leaning forward, radiant and almost on the brink of tears. "That's completely true. You should see his Press notices! Nobody can understand why he didn't receive recognition in the Birthday Honours."

Benedict muttered something inaudible to himself, and

Aldous once more came to the rescue. "Plenty of time for him still. I saw Mrs. Temple this morning, Father: she said that she would be coming to call on you both, very shortly."

"Good," said Godfrey. "You'll like her, Rosita. She's a nice woman, very natural and direct."

Marina said nothing, and her stepmother had the impression that once more the volatile little creature was on the brink of tears. Was Marina goose enough to have lost her heart to poor, dear Wynnington Temple who had grown sadly fat, and was old enough to be her father? Rosita hoped not. Calf-love was bad enough in the ordinary way, but this would be ridiculous! The child was fresh and delicious with a most original charm: she must not be allowed to waste it on a man who had had fashionable London at his feet.

"Have some more tea, dear," said Rosita affectionately: she would have to build Marina up and find her an interest.

"No thanks," said her stepdaughter and added: "I simply adore your hair."

"You must forgive my family," said Godfrey, who was looking put out; "its manners are non-existent."

"But I love compliments," protested Rosita; "they take years off my age, and I feel very flattered, Marina."

"You look much younger than we expected," said Hugh.

"Personally," remarked Benedict, "I had every reliance on Father's taste."

"In which case," said Aldous, "you're justified."

"Oh, look here," exploded Godfrey, with a suddenness which made them all jump, "clear out, the lot of you. We'll see you again at dinner."

"But why?" protested Rosita. "Oh, do let them stay. I'm enjoying myself."

The young Dalehams sat where they were. They looked amused. They were ready to make every excuse for their father, who, poor man, could not help being in love, but they were a good deal entertained at the spectacle of Rosita

standing up for them. It tickled them to discover that she had obviously no idea how well they could do it for themselves.

But Rosita had turned her smiling face to Godfrey, and had observed no answering smile. The fact dismayed her: she was astonished and disturbed to see that he was genuinely put out. He sat huddled in his chair, tapping the arm with irritable fingers. No doubt of it, Godfrey was sulking. And that would never do. Rosita saw that she would have to be tactful. She therefore glanced at the clock and exclaimed, very prettily: "It's never six o'clock? And I've unpacked nothing!" Whereupon she got up and Benedict, not quite grinning, remembered to open the door.

Crossing the wide hall, hung so lamentably with so many antique weapons, and more prints of Chinese warriors in dressing-gowns, she wondered, a little doubtfully, if her exit had been successful. That was the worst of it, she was never sure of these things, and now that she was forty she never would be.

At the top of the staircase she encountered Walker the parlour-maid. "Cook wishes to know, madam, what time you would like dinner?"

'Black doesn't suit her,' thought Rosita rapidly; 'she will look less elderly and forbidding in brown. With a nice little coffee-coloured cap and apron.' And smiling at Walker, almost as if she saw her already transformed, she said: "What time does Mr. Daleham usually dine, Walker?"

"It's supposed to be eight o'clock, madam. But none of them's ever punctual. Of course, Cook and me 'ud never have stayed if it hadn't been that we was led to understand there'd soon be a change in the arrangements. I will say we made allowances for Mr. Daleham being on his own, with no one to remind him, and the young gentlemen and Miss Marina not, so to speak, having anybody over them, but

of course we couldn't stop on, not if things didn't get more regular. I mean to say, method's method."

"Oh, *exactly*," agreed Rosita. "I *know*. I quite see your point. It's so difficult for a brilliant man to think of these things. And naturally I'll talk to the children."

"Yes, madam," returned Walker. "As I say, no one can't carry on and do themselves justice in a house where things are all anyhow. Then I'll tell Cook eight o'clock, madam?"

"Oh *do*," said Rosita heartily, too heartily. She opened her bedroom door, and was immediately rewarded by the glow of a fire. At once her spirits soared. The smoky pink chrysanthemums on the mantelpiece were illuminated in the shaft of leaping light. Beyond the green curtains, which hid the long line of wide windows, was the still dark countryside of pine-woods, and cottages, and snug little valleys.

'Oh I'm happy,' she thought, with all the more gratitude because she had been unhappy only two minutes ago. She turned up a lamp, and looked kindly at the room which she would presently have to alter. More lacquer and more silk! And on the wall one of those difficult paintings of a bridge, a stream, and a pagoda, which might so easily be priceless or just Caledonian Market. 'The *shape* of the room's nice,' decided Rosita, 'and really one needn't spend much. Bleached oak and chintz, lovely old-fashioned chintz with flounces . . .' She paused and looked at Godfrey's face a little anxiously as he came in.

"I've been reading the Riot Act to those youngsters of mine," he announced, joining her at the fire; "they're an egotistical lot and I apologise for them."

"Dearest, they're delightful."

"No," said Godfrey firmly, taking her in his arms, "they are *not*. And I rubbed it in. I made it clear from the start that I'm not going to have their monopolising the whole of your attention."

She laid her face against his. "They were only doing the honours. I thought they behaved beautifully."

"Well, I've conveyed the reverse impression—kiss me!"

It seemed to her entirely wonderful: already he was jealous! It was, of course, absurd. But she was so accustomed to be taken for granted, even to be accorded a good-natured neglect, that she had difficulty in crediting her good fortune. So often she had been alone, with only uncomfortable recollections for company!

"What are you thinking about?" he demanded.

"I was remembering what it felt like to be solitary."

"Never again."

"No, never again."

The sound of scratching on the door-panel, of a loud snuffling and a little whine, interrupted their agreeable employment.

"That's Punchinello," said Godfrey when the noises redoubled. "Do you mind if I let him in?"

"Of course not."

The spaniel, wriggling a great deal and swinging his ears as he ran, trotted round the room, examining their boxes with interest. Presently he sank down before the fire, washed a fat paw, and finally fell asleep.

"The servants don't like him," said Godfrey; "he *will* lie on the drawing-room cushions, you know. And he generally spends the night on my bed."

"Punchinello must get used to sleeping in a nice cosy corner of the passage, mustn't he?" said Rosita comfortably, stroking the matted coat. "Who grooms him, dear?"

"One of the boys, I think," returned Godfrey; "that's to say, if they remember. Punch isn't very keen on being groomed." And suddenly he smiled, and his whole face lit up with an expression of almost boyish mischief. "You'll have to take the lot of us in hand, my darling. I expect there are any number of things you notice which, I'm afraid, are

rather sadly neglected or totally unsuitable. You must reform our taste and improve our manners, and generally mend the error of our ways."

"Oh *no*," declared Rosita. But she meant "Oh yes."

4

PUNCHINELLO, it is to be regretted, did not behave well. He was unaccustomed to being thwarted, and finding himself banished to a warm, but nevertheless alien, bed at the end of the corridor, he protested at the top of his voice for some considerable time.

Both Marina and Aldous remonstrated with him; Hugh, roused to active resentment, threw a slipper at his head; and an irate Walker appeared with the peremptory demand that Cook and she should at least be permitted to have a proper night's rest.

Benedict did not interfere: he said it was his father's business, and it is to be feared that he got a good deal of fun out of the whole unfortunate episode.

Finally, Godfrey, in the worst of tempers, slung the dog into Aldous' room, without apology, and slammed the door. Whereupon Punchinello moaned softly—and sometimes not so softly—until morning.

Aldous failed to appear the next morning at breakfast, and nearly everyone else had a headache. Later, Hugh was despatched on his bicycle to the village veterinary surgeon to ask for a packet of sleeping draughts. He returned with a neat little box of bromide powders, and the information that the invalid would improve in the course of the next week or so. "The vet talked of creatures of habit," said Hugh bitterly. "I asked him if the powders were injurious to human beings, Because, if not, I should like one myself to-night."

In consequence of this disturbance they were all a little on edge. It was unfortunate, therefore, that Benedict should have been quite so precipitate in putting his case before his stepmother.

It happened that he found himself alone with her after luncheon. Godfrey, still out of temper, had disappeared into his study, and the other members of the family had taken the advantage of a wet afternoon to sleep off the effects of the night.

Rosita sat on the sofa, leaning without enthusiasm against the very Oriental fringe of the shawl which draped its back. She wished that Godfrey had not been telling her that he found the children an ever-increasing expense. It had made it quite impossible for her to tackle him on the subject—the very burning subject—of redecorating and refurnishing his house.

She had *The Times* newspaper on her lap, and was deciding to acquaint herself with the matter of all three of its leaders, that she might introduce a little intelligent conversation over the tea-table.

Rosita was a humble person, having small faith in her own ideas and a considerable veneration for the printed word. It was certainly a pity that she felt distinctly sleepy that afternoon, and not in a specially assimilative mood. And it was a greater pity still that Benedict should have seen fit to disturb her.

But Benedict was so intent on his own interests, and opinions, that he was not concerned with considering whether Rosita was quite in the right frame of mind to receive them. It never so much as occurred to him that she, also, might be a creature dependent upon mood or circumstance: or that at one time she might be of less use to him than at another.

“May I speak to you, Rosita, for a few minutes?”

“Why, my dear, of course.” She was delighted that he

should want to speak to her: his picturesque untidiness, his brittle poise, his young, ridiculous intolerance charmed her. She was ready to enjoy anything he had to say, but she did not realise what demands he was going to make on her; nor how the wretched Punchinello had temporarily robbed her of clear thinking and sensible counsel.

"It's like this," said Benedict as he sat down beside her. "Father doesn't understand me."

Rosita remained silent but not, she hoped, unsympathetic. At all costs she was going to be loyal to Godfrey, but nevertheless she was not going to miss his children's confidence.

"I'm probably a little difficult," continued Benedict, settling himself more comfortably on the sofa. "In fact, I'm sure I am. I find it very difficult to adjust myself to uncongenial surroundings. I'm not at all certain that I'm going to be happy at Oxford. But Father appears to be determined to keep me there. Actually, it's very short-sighted."

"What do you want to do?" asked Rosita.

Benedict looked at her with approval. "Write poetry," he said. "I'm pretty serious about it. Modern stuff, with a rather strong political bias."

"Oh," said his stepmother faintly.

He nodded. "If Father would let me leave Oxford, I'm perfectly prepared to earn my own living. Until I got known, I'd take up journalism."

"But, my dear," she protested, "for a start you'd be put on to reporting fashionable weddings and lurid murders. And one can't live on that. Nor, alas! can one live on verse-making."

"All free-lances don't die in early youth," retorted Benedict obstinately.

"Perhaps not. But they don't have an easy life, and, forgive me, Benedict, but extreme poverty isn't romantic. You wouldn't like it."

He planted his elbows on his knees, and thrust his fingers through his hair. "It's the same story every time. Your arguments are precisely Father's. Obstacles are for ever put in one's way."

Rosita felt very dashed and also—it must be confessed—very sleepy. She was sorry about Benedict's future, but she did wish that it could wait until she had had forty winks.

"If you stay out your time at Oxford," she said, "and take a degree, you stand a better chance of employment when you go down. And you can continue to write poetry all the time."

"Between lectures and football," muttered Benedict savagely.

"People have done it, Benedict, before now."

"I daresay. I couldn't. That's all."

She glanced at the thin, sensitive hands clasping that dark, untidy head, and wondered if Benedict would mind very much if she hugged him.

"Oh, my dear," she began, "I know *exactly* how you feel."

Her stepson looked at her suspiciously and sighed. "Quite," he said, and added in a sudden burst of honesty: "I know you'd like to, Rosita, but I'm afraid you don't. It's not your fault, of course."

"But I *do*," she protested. "Do you suppose that I have always been middle-aged?"

Benedict smiled, a slightly exasperated smile, as though he were dealing with a charming but rather foolish child.

"No," he said, "I'm very far from imagining anything of the sort. I think you're very young even now."

She hesitated. Was it quite the compliment she needed? Did it suggest sanity, humour, and admirable advice? "I meant," she began, and was caught by a sudden uncontrollable yawn.

"I'm sorry: I'm boring you," said Benedict coldly, getting up.

"Not in the least," she exclaimed, gazing at him with watery, apologetic eyes. "It's only that I'm so tired after last night, but do let's go on talking. *Please!*"

He looked at her severely. He would have liked to walk out of the room with an air of dignified forgiveness, but the temptation to remain and discuss himself was too much for him. "All right," he said, sitting down once more, "only let me know if I'm tedious."

"My dear!" said Rosita, resolutely determined not to yawn again.

"Well," continued Benedict, "my idea was, that if you wouldn't mind tackling Father you're more likely to be successful with him than I am. Put in a nutshell, what I want you to do is to ask him to let me leave the 'Varsity, and start straight away on Fleet Street. And, since I shouldn't be costing him anything for education, perhaps he'd give me a small allowance until I became self-supporting. My own impression is that I shouldn't have to depend on him for long."

"I see," said Rosita. "You think that would be quite wise? A classical education is a useful basis on which to build an artistic career, you know."

"I don't altogether agree," said Benedict loftily. "The ability to make verses is independent of education. Look at Robert Burns."

"I thought we should come to him! But . . ."

"Anyhow," he interrupted, "I'm reading History, not Classics. And I'm not interested in History. Modern languages are more in my line."

"Well, I don't suppose Godfrey would mind if you took languages instead . . ."

"But," insisted Benedict fretfully, "I tell you I'm fed up with the 'Varsity. After all, one can always travel . . ."

"Not without means!"

"I don't see why not. I might be a foreign correspondent on a London paper."

Rosita raised an eyebrow, but Benedict was perfectly serious.

"I don't like restrictions on my liberty," he went on; "I find it extraordinarily irksome. It's more difficult for me than for other people. I mean, games bore me, and I'm not interested in all this sex business, and I haven't got what I believe is called the commercial instinct. Nor am I attracted to the sort of academic life to which Father's more or less devoted his life. I mean to say, what I *have* got, for better or worse, is the poetic temperament . . ."

A peculiar sound, half sigh and half cough, escaped Rosita. But it was no good: she could not forbid that second, that most devastating yawn. And, when she had recovered from it, Benedict had left the room.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Rosita, "how *most* unfortunate! And how like me! Now I shall have all my work cut out to win back his confidence. But meantime," she put her feet up on the sofa, "I simply *must* have a nap."

The newspaper was forgotten, and the intelligent conversation; she was really too tired to bother about anything. The silvery head sank deeper into one of the deplorably Oriental cushions, the pretty narrow feet dangled contentedly. Rosita slept.

Her dreams were agreeable, but a little confused. She thought that she was still in Paris, yet she was busy re-decorating her house, and somebody, but who it was she could not make out, kept interrupting her just as she was trying to choose between two pieces of hydrangea coloured cretonne. 'Rosita,' said the insistent voice. '*Rosita!*'

She woke to find Marina standing at her side, a tiny immaculate Marina, with shining hair and cool, clean hands. Very nice and very proper, of course, but when a

person has been indulging in an afternoon nap, and has had no time to repair the damage, and is, alas! forty years old, the sight of anything quite so admirable as fresh youth, recently tidied, is completely demoralising.

"I *am* so sorry to have disturbed you," said Marina; "you looked *so* sweet."

"I'm sure I did," returned Rosita cheerfully, sitting up and wondering just how unfortunate she really did look. It was odd, she reflected, how anything so *quiet* as a little sleep could have so active an effect on the appearance.

"I *had* to do it," Marina was explaining, "because I simply must talk to you before the others come down."

Her stepmother glanced at the clock. "Yes dear, of course," she said, "but you will give me time to change before tea, won't you?"

Marina instantly looked sulky. "Well, if you'd rather, why not go up now?"

"No, *no!* Why, it's only a quarter to four and . . ." she checked herself. Perhaps she had better not add, "And I'm sure you won't be long." It was hardly tactful: besides, Marina still looked a little stormy. "I'm *longing* to hear whatever you've got to say," she finished weakly.

"Well," said Marina, promptly sitting down beside her, "it's like this. I want to go on the stage. I can dance, you know, and sing a bit, and all my governesses said I was better at elocution than anything else. It isn't as though it were just the opinion of one or two people: we've had *heaps* of governesses. Most of the ones who came out to China got married, and the ones we had in South America all wanted to marry Father."

"Godfrey!"

"Well, it's not so extraordinary," defended Marina, "you married him yourself. I must admit the boys and I have been saying that considering you're so attractive we can't imagine what you saw in him, but still you did it, so you

can't very well blame them for trying. It used to annoy him very much. However, that's by the way. The point is, I truly have got talent. Even Mr. Temple says so. He says I'm as clever as a wagonful of monkeys, and when he wants to be horrid he says I'm not at all unlike one to look at. Seriously though, he doesn't often throw bouquets. And he's told me heaps of times that I'm precocious and unbearable, and that if he were Father he'd take a broomstick to me. I simply can't tell you, Rosita," finished Marina with shining eyes, "what a darling Mr. Temple is!"

"But you mustn't fall in love with him," said Rosita gaily. Not that she felt gay. She forgot her own tousled head, the undoubted imprint of that horrible cushion on her cheek, the melted powder and the whole rather dishevelled appearance. Instead, she saw not the little fashion-plate beside her but a romantic, tender-hearted, distressingly vulnerable child.

"But, Rosita, I *have*!" She squeezed her stepmother's wrist. "It's marvellous: it makes me feel so happy! He doesn't know, of course. I expect the same thing happens to most women who meet him. It doesn't matter. But I do want to justify his faith in me: I do want to be a successful actress."

Rosita could have cried. "But, my darling," she said, "it takes years to become a successful actress, and other things don't stand still. You say Mr. Temple doesn't know: I expect he does. I expect he wants you to be fond of him. And that's dangerous. You're not seventeen and he's—what, sixty? Doesn't it strike you as being, to say the least of it, unwise?"

Marina looked at her. "Have you been in love much?" she asked.

"No, not much: not often, that's to say. But I do know what I'm talking about."

"You see you're safe. It's over for you. It's easy to give advice when one's safe."

"Am I 'safe', Marina? I don't think anyone is."

"Well, I mean, you've got Father, you're not likely to fall in love again."

"No," admitted Rosita meekly, "that's true."

"And I don't see that your experience is very much help to me," continued her stepdaughter, "because you've arrived at the stage of being rather wise and sensible, and therefore you probably can't remember what it feels like to be precisely the reverse. Also, if you'll forgive me, I don't think you have ever had the artistic temperament. Benedict and I have both got it." She sighed complacently and added: "It plays *such* havoc with our lives."

"Have you told Mr. Temple that?" enquired Rosita.

"Oh yes." She blushed and added: "He says it's 'all my eye and Betty Martin'. He says it's simply an excuse for our bad manners. You can't *think* how severe he is, Rosita."

"Oh yes, I can. And if you want my opinion on that, my dear, I think he says quite the right thing from quite the wrong motive."

Marina grinned. "He does rather churn one up," she admitted.

Her stepmother was silent for a moment. Really the little thing was the oddest mixture of ignorance, sophistication, and native good humour.

"Well, don't you break your heart over him," she said at last, "he's not worth it. And, if you want to be an actress, by all means start training, but do it for the love of the stage, and not for the sake of any one particular person."

Marina flung her arms round Rosita's neck and hugged her. "Oh, you *are* an angel! Will you really persuade Father to let me go up to London and start straight away?"

"I expect he'd let you join a dramatic school if you really wanted to. We should have to find somewhere for you to stay. A girls' hostel or something of that sort."

Rosita was beginning to think the idea a good one. If

Marina had talent it was desirable to foster it, hard work would do her good, and she would be removed from the immediate influence of Mr. Temple.

"Father'll do anything you ask him," declared Marina rapturously, "I know he will. He sort of got it into his head, at one time, that he wanted me to stay at home and go all country lady, but I should simply *loathe* it. Besides, now that he's got you it isn't necessary." She hugged Rosita again. "I must say I'm terribly thankful that he had the sense to choose anything so good. You will *promise* to ask him, won't you, angel?"

"I promise," said Rosita, laughing.

"And don't you worry a bit about me being on my own in London," said Marina, releasing her. "Mr. Temple's got a flat up there, and he'll keep an eye on me."

5

It was Godfrey who suggested taking Punchinello for a walk after dinner, in order to tire him out and allow the sleeping draught to do the rest. Benedict and Marina decided to accompany their father, and Rosita was left with the eldest and youngest members of the family, and the devout hope that they, at least, would not choose to be communicative that evening. But she had reckoned without Hugh's fatal instinct for showmanship—with himself in reserve as chief attraction.

"You may not know it, Rosita," he remarked from the depths of a comfortable armchair, "but we have an artist in our midst. He hides his light under a bushel, but he can't quite succeed in extinguishing it."

"Shut up," said Aldous, turning scarlet.

Rosita looked at him in genuine surprise. She had supposed that this stolid good-natured boy was more common-

place than the others. He had square, comfortable hands and a heavy chin: he seemed a genuine kind of creature and undoubtedly thoughtful, but she had not imagined that he was particularly gifted.

"You paint?" she said. "How delightful, Aldous! May I see something of yours?"

He looked embarrassed. "Yes—of course. But they are not very great, I'm afraid."

"Don't you believe him," advised Hugh. "He's been to art schools and had special masters, and they say that in another year or two he'll make a name for himself. Did you notice, Rosita, that little water-colour in Father's study above the mantelpiece? That's his. It's called 'A Garden in Chile'."

"But, my dear," exclaimed Rosita, "I should think that I did notice it! Frankly, it's the only picture in this house which took my fancy. It's *very*, very good, Aldous."

"It was a pretty garden," he mumbled; "I had quite fun doing the thing."

"Shall I fetch your sketch-book?" offered Hugh.

"No," said Aldous, sharply. He did not like things being fetched for him. Neither did he care to hear his pictures discussed. He looked at Rosita, and said, almost pleadingly: "It's just a hobby."

"Oh, but you've every reason to take it more seriously than that," she returned. "Now that you've settled in England you ought to find an art school you think suitable and join it as soon as may be. Of course, if you decide on London . . ."

"But I don't want to take up painting seriously," he interrupted, "and I should simply hate to live in London."

"Alas for our hopes of having at least one distinguished member of our family!" said Hugh. "He wants to keep hens."

"*Hens?*" repeated Rosita, incredulously. "But, Aldous dear, anyone can keep hens."

"Oh no," he said earnestly, "I beg your pardon, but really you're wrong. So many people fail. But I've read up the subject a good deal, and I've talked with a man who runs a chicken-farm, and who *does* happen to be successful, and he'd be perfectly willing to take me on, just as a pupil, and later as a partner." Aldous paused a moment and stretched out his lame leg. "*This*," he said, rather shyly, "wouldn't prove much of a drawback. I can walk much more than people suppose, and I can drive a car, and a horse and cart, coming to that."

Rosita was touched by the expression on his face: she wanted to feel angry with him for his obstinacy, but she could not.

"What does your father think?" she enquired.

"Father," replied Hugh before Aldous had the chance, "takes just the attitude you'd suppose. All his swans are ducklings. But we'll surprise him yet. In order to accomplish that I do feel he must be made to see reason. For instance, this idea of a school for me is quite monstrous."

"It isn't," said Aldous, "it'll be the making of you. I wish to heaven I'd had the chance."

"Very likely, it 'ud have suited you. But it won't suit me. I'm not the type." He looked at Rosita and added: "I'm six months over the usual age of entry, and six *years* older than any of my contemporaries. That's what foreign travel has done for me, quite apart from my being rather exceptionally intelligent."

"Are you?" said Rosita calmly. "What makes you think that?"

"I know it," he replied, not in the least put out. "It may be my misfortune, but it remains a fact. I haven't got any one spectacular talent, but taken all round I'm extremely advanced for my age . . ."

"That's true," interposed Aldous, "which is why school will be so good for you. You've never learnt to be young—

not that it's your fault at all—and if you're not careful it'll soon be too late."

"I don't know that I particularly want to be 'young'," returned Hugh. "I imagine that it's a rather overrated state. And the thought of organised games makes me feel perfectly sick."

"That's only because you've not been well," his brother assured him. "You've never felt energetic because the countries we were in didn't suit you. But you'll soon get fit in England." And he looked at the younger boy almost imploringly. It seemed a queer stroke of irony to Aldous that neither Benedict nor Hugh shared the deep interest in those games from which his own infirmity debarred him. Benedict he had long given up as hopelessly indolent, but he trusted by virtue of vicarious enthusiasm to instil some love of healthy exercise into the heart of the younger brother. "Your muscles," he went on, "are lamentable. You really ought to do something about them."

"You stick to chicken-farming, old chap," advised Hugh.

Rosita looked from one to the other. The affection which the young Dalehams displayed towards each other seemed equalled by the mutual candour they exhibited. And this surprised her. Her own brother had sat on her so firmly that she had supposed at least some mild form of tyranny to exist in all families. The freedom she found among her step-children, therefore, gave her a sense of bewilderment.

Well here, anyhow, were two more problems with which she had to concern herself. That of Aldous interested her deeply. That he should be so gifted, and so anxious to disparage the gift, seemed extraordinary. Yet his modesty was, she thought, not unlike his father's. Undoubtedly Godfrey belittled his own scholarship and general ability, presenting always a vague semi-humorous air which saved him the trouble of being practical and sometimes, it must be confessed, of exercising good sense.

But Rosita, who had been used all her life to highly competent men of loud emphatic opinions, and had indeed been led by her father and brother to suppose that such, and such only, were of the highest consequence, found in her husband every quality she most admired.

And if Aldous was going to follow in his footsteps so much the better. If he thought little of his talent it was all to the good: he would work harder and achieve more. His simplicity would doubtless be useful to him. If an artist were child-like, his public was all the better pleased.

Rosita, in fact, saw Aldous' way plain for him. The chicken-farm was quite ridiculous. He had all the equipment with which to establish a career, and certainly it ought to be done. She made up her mind, then and there, to help him.

"Returning to my own case for a moment," Hugh was saying, "I do wish you'd stop talking like a book, Rosita, and see the whole thing from my point of view. What good is a school going to do me? Half the time I shall be in the sanatorium. In the East I had fever, and in the West I got bronchial asthma, and if I'm supposed to be better now you can't see me cross-country-running or rowing feverish boat-races . . ."

"You needn't do either," began Rosita.

"I should faint on the cricket field and die of exhaustion at football," declared Hugh rapidly, "and there the argument for sending me to school really ends. For I should get just as good an education from tutors at home."

"I take leave to doubt that. Besides," she added a little impatiently, "you can't be sheltered all your life. You must meet your contemporaries some time and find out how you stand. You may imagine that you will dislike it extremely, but you can't possibly tell until you put it to the test of experience."

"Most fellows," remarked Aldous, a trifle sententiously, "love their schools. I really don't know what you're afraid

of, Hugh. Naturally, you won't have to play games if they don't find you medically fit."

The younger boy looked at him, and past him at Rosita. Their good-humoured intolerance and common sense caused his small sallow face to whiten: his eyes darkened and his mouth grew set.

"Four years of it and Oxford to follow!" he said. "One regrets that one didn't die in infancy. One so nearly did it—which makes it all the more tantalising." And getting up he walked out of the room.

"Between ourselves," said Rosita unguardedly, "I'm afraid he *will* have rather a bad time at school, poor dear."

Aldous looked stolid. "Hugh's old for his years," he said, "none of that talk is put on: it's natural to him. Other fellows might find his idiom unusual, but he's very amusing, and if he gets into a high form from the start I think he'll be interested."

She was conscious of being slightly but firmly reproved. And she became aware that it would never do to criticise one young Daleham to another, whatever they might say among themselves. She wondered if the same thing applied to Godfrey. It would certainly make things difficult if it were so. Of course he had discussed the children with candour and without prejudice in her company, but she had so far replied only with compliments.

What would happen if she said that she agreed with him in finding Hugh's precocity tiresome, or in discovering that Benedict's airs and graces were absurd?

'I must be very, very careful,' thought Rosita.

Aldous had picked up a book and was scanning it with a rather solemn expression on his face. She wondered if he were feeling unfriendly or merely embarrassed, and asked kindly enough:

"What's that you're so deep in?"

Her stepson raised his eyes. "It's a technical explanation

of the best means of raising chickens," he told her.

Rosita blinked. "I'll just go upstairs and fetch my sewing," she said.

Really, the thought of being alone for a little while was quite pleasant. And, as she crossed the hall, it occurred to her that she might look in at the study and examine again Aldous' little water-colour. Switching on the light she advanced—and was confronted by the spectacle of Hugh, sprawling in an armchair with his head buried in his arms, weeping copiously.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, and hurried forward. "What is the matter? Have you hurt yourself?" The thought that he was much too old to cry was lost in a feeling of mingled surprise and relief at the collapse of his assurance. "There," she said, kneeling down, and putting her arms round him. "Tell me what it is."

His wet face lay against her neck: he sniffed dismally. "Please don't let me be sent away," he whispered; "keep me here."

She was both appalled and surprised. His air of impudent poise had completely deceived her. Now she saw a very small nervous boy, entirely at the mercy of an unstable imagination. "Dear old man," she said, "we'll talk it over together, your father and you and I. But don't you think it's rather a pity to make up your mind that you'd dislike an experience you haven't even tried?"

"No," he said tearfully, "because I'm *quite*, quite sure I'm right. It isn't as though I'd been brought up in this country. It's going to take me all my time to adjust myself as it is. And I simply must be kept at home with you all."

"But, my dear, the others will probably be away. Marina wants to go to London; Benedict will be at Oxford; and although Aldous' plans are unsettled, I don't suppose for a moment that he'll remain at home."

"Never mind," he mumbled, "I shall be with you and Father."

She stroked his hair soothingly. "I wonder if you could be sent as a weekly boarder," she began, but Hugh cut her short.

"No, no!" he protested, "I want to sleep at home. I *must* sleep at home."

For a while she remained silent, still on her knees, holding him close. She was remembering her own youth, and how, as the shyest of little girls, the thought of leaving her own room, and the society of her nurse for the communal dormitory had terrified her. Eventually, of course, she had got used to it; one could get used to anything; but she had never liked it. Always she had longed for the quiet and serenity of her own four walls, and the little engraving by Morland hanging above her bed.

And, as she thought of the strange, difficult, ridiculous past, she ceased to feel middle-aged: she was once more twelve years old, with a sinking feeling in her stomach and damp palms to her hands: there was the desire to cry, the sensation of nausea, the awful knowledge of helplessness in a world peopled by stern authority.

And, forgetful of all that she meant to say, all the wise counsels and the sage optimism, she exclaimed unwisely: "I really don't see that you need go if you feel like this about it."

Hugh raised his head from her shoulder: he undoubtedly looked a wreck, but delight spread over his face and lent it a brittle sort of happiness. "Rosita!" he exclaimed, "I say, you're an angel! You'll tell Father that?"

"Yes," she said, getting up from the floor, "yes, I shall tell Godfrey that." She was really quite drunk with memory. If someone had come to her, years ago, and let her off the prospect of the endless schoolroom, how elated she would have felt! How ardently she would have promised to respect her governesses and work hard at home! Of course she would have missed some very agreeable friendships, and

perhaps lacked a certain capacity for taking the rough with the smooth. But this was not the time to enumerate the advantages of a little loss of individualism.

"Yes, darling, I will speak to Godfrey," she said, "and now, if I were you, I should go to bed. You look tired out."

"I've had a headache for several days," he told her; "first it was from the excitement of your coming, and then the affair of Punchinello, and finally this finding you on the side of the others. But I'll be all right now."

She looked down at him as he stood there, small, shock-headed and skinny, with his large eyes shining and his pointed chin still not quite steady.

"Anyhow, I should have had to keep you at home to feed you up," she said. "When we go out together to-morrow I shall have you weighed."

Hugh looked more pleased than ever. "You're quite right," he said, "and poor old Aldous, who is as strong as a bull, is, as usual, quite wrong."

Rosita was about to agree with him when she remembered that it might possibly be politic to hold her tongue.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "go to bed now, old man, and forget all your troubles."

Hugh eyed her with deep approval. "When I think," he said, "that almost anyone might have landed Father I can't be too thankful that it was you." After which he departed, leaving Rosita doubtful.

'Almost anyone?' Had Godfrey really been on the lookout for a wife? The notion took a deal of glamour away. 'But,' thought Rosita, scolding herself, 'what do I want with glamour at my age? He's in love with me even if he did intend to fall in love with the first suitable person.'

All the same she returned to the drawing-room in rather a chastened frame of mind, and found the place empty. Even Aldous had deserted.

"Oh well," she said untruthfully, "it's nice to be alone."

After all, it was my own company that I was seeking when I came upon Hugh."

But in spite of her attempts to console herself she was very glad when the walkers returned.

"Punch is exhausted," declared Godfrey; "he'll sleep to-night."

"There's a heavenly moon," said Marina, "the country looks bewitched. I wish you had come, Rosita."

"You'd have enjoyed it," said Benedict, who was looking ill-humoured, "floundering about the common and falling over gorse bushes and into rabbit-holes, with Punch losing himself every five minutes, and all of us whooping after him loud enough to wake the whole county."

"Benedict," announced Godfrey in the privacy of the bedroom, "is becoming excessively tiresome."

"He *is* so good-looking," pleaded Rosita.

"That does not prevent him from being, at the moment at any rate, a very exasperating companion."

"Tell me, does he really write good verse?"

"Verse? No. Not better than any other youngster with a turn for it. I used to try my hand at his age. I had a go at copying Matthew Arnold and a pretty mess I made of it. Benedict's masters are those difficult young gentlemen who fight shy of rhyme or reason." And Godfrey paused, in the middle of unfastening his waistcoat, to chuckle.

Rosita smiled, a little absently. Perhaps now was not *quite* the time? Better, very likely, to mention one of the others.

"I found dear little Hugh in tears this evening," she began.

"What, again? That youngster's always weeping. Let's hope he'll have the sense to overcome the tendency at school. It doesn't necessarily mean he's unhappy, you know. I was a great weeper myself."

"You?"

"Oh dear me, yes," said Godfrey, letting go his braces and smiling in a very indulgent fashion at his long-lost self. "Oh, good heavens, rather. I cried copiously on every suitable occasion. It used to annoy people a good deal at first. But after a while they just took it as a matter of course. All the same it's inconvenient, I confess," he added, staring at the dressing-table mirror as though the elderly person he saw there were really a stranger to him, "I confess I wouldn't go through my first year at school again for all the money in the kingdom."

"And are you quite determined to make Hugh go through his?"

Godfrey wagged a reproachful finger at her. "Rosital!" he said, "the little devil's been getting at you."

"I admit it," she said gaily, "I admit it freely. And, as his ambassador, I beg you to let him stay at home. The common mould isn't for Hugh and nothing will make him like other people. So why should he suffer in resisting attempts to change him?"

"He could learn not to resist."

She sighed, rumbled her pretty hair and went over to the dressing-table where Godfrey was standing. "Look," she said, and nodded at their reflections in the mirror. "Two happy people. Have we the right to thrust unhappiness on someone else even for his supposed good? You say you wouldn't go through your first term again . . ."

"But," he interrupted, "I add, that after that first extremely hostile reception I fared pretty well. I'm certain the experience was valuable. Both Aldous and Benedict lament the fact that I supplied them with tutors instead of sending them home for a conventional education. They blame me, quite openly. I don't blame myself. It was Henrietta's wish as well as mine that we should not be separated from the boys. But in Hugh's case the difficulty no longer exists."

"All the same," she pleaded, "you're not righting

Benedict's and Aldous' supposed wrongs by giving Hugh the treatment they lacked. He certainly won't thank you for it. Hugh's not going to change. And, Godfrey, I know it's a feeble sort of argument, but I *do* understand how he feels: I was a horribly sensitive child myself. I realise it's not the same for a girl, but my experience undoubtedly made me diffident all my life."

"Poor angel!" said Godfrey, a trifle absently. Rosita in a pink wrapper, her silvery curls slightly disordered, her cheeks faintly flushed, made him somewhat indifferent to all else. "Well, well," he said, fondling her shoulders, "I'll think it over. It's too late to settle anything to-night. Of course, the boy *is* delicate."

Rosita kissed him. She was conscious of a warm and happy sense of triumph. 'How *utterly* reasonable he is!' she thought. 'How just!'

It was a pity Punchinello had none of his master's amiable characteristics. The effect of the sleeping draught wore off in the neighbourhood of three o'clock in the morning, after which time his lamentations were constant and full-throated.

Walker and the cook gave notice next morning.

6

THE callers began to make those short, embarrassing visits before Rosita had time so much as to change the drawing-room cushions. They came in twos and threes, and made beautifully polite conversation, and dropped their cards into the large brass bowl in the hall.

Rosita detested that brass bowl. It stood upon an oak chest and she had already summoned enough courage to tell Godfrey how very much prettier her blue *cloisonné* vase would look in its place. He had agreed at once, adding, however, that it would only be broken immediately

and that it was really safer in the spare-room cupboard.

"Besides," he had reminded her, "we must have something to hold the cards."

"But," she protested, "we shall soon get rid of them. Presently everyone will have called."

"Well, darling, if I were you I'd wait a bit," Godfrey returned amiably. "I think you'll find the bowl useful. We always used it abroad."

"In London," observed Rosita, "one never sees such a thing. Nobody calls or leaves paste-boards. It has quite, quite gone out."

"But this," smiled Godfrey, "is not London, my pet."

And Rosita, who was feeling just a little hurt over that connubial 'we', made no reply. Already she was discovering that living in the country was not quite what she expected. Far from being care-free, convention exercised a disciplinary sway. There were cliques, there were rules, there were obligations.

If one belonged to the Vicarage set one did not take tea with the Wynnington Temples, and if one called in the doctor on the hill one did not play bridge with the doctor in the valley. No one dropped in unexpectedly, nor ever stayed for a meal to which they had not previously been invited.

There were very few young people, but those who were there were generally on the brink of going somewhere else. The nearest town was five miles away, and the village consisted of a post office and general shop, a chemist and a butcher.

"Fancy going five miles to have my hair set! What *fun!*" exclaimed Rosita doubtfully.

"I go once a week," Marina had told her. "There's a bus which runs every hour. It's a bore, of course, if one misses it. However, it's generally late: it's a beautifully casual bus."

"And how," asked Mrs. Wynnington Temple, when she came to call, "do you like the depths of the country?"

"Oh *immensely*," said Rosita.

"I suppose you garden? Everyone gardens here. I always think that yours has great possibilities."

"We've got a man . . ."

"Oh all gardeners are fools. Never rely on them if you want your place to look decent. Plan everything yourself. Now last year . . ." And she became very explanatory and very technical. Latin names tripped with the greatest ease off her tongue.

Rosita was impressed and confused. She knew nothing of plants and herbs. "I—I simply adore tulips," she faltered.

Mrs. Wynnington Temple momentarily paused. "Which variety?"

"The—the pink ones," said Rosita, flushed but determined.

Her guest was very kind and helpful. She offered to lend catalogues. She gave the address of several nurseries. She advised listening-in to the radio, and she was most informative about manure. "I've looked at your soil," she explained, "and my advice to you is, arm all your family with spades and start digging *now*. You can't do anything with it in its present state. Make those boys of your husband's get down to it."

"I don't think," said Rosita, "that they like digging very much."

"Oh nonsense," retorted Mrs. Wynnington Temple, "it will do them good: best exercise in the world. Put Marina on to it too. That child needs occupation."

Rosita glanced at the weather-beaten face before her. It had a shrewd, kindly air, but the rather frosty blue eyes were uncommonly direct and the large mouth remarkably firm. She seemed a queer sort of wife for Wynnington Temple to possess: a battered felt hat was crammed down

upon a shaggy head of grey hair; a leather coat hung loosely over a tweed suit; several scarves, a belt or two, a pair of mud-bespattered brogues and extremely shabby gauntlets all occurred to Rosita as being odd wear for a formal call. Besides, was not this the wife of a distinguished actor and the recipient of vicarious glory?

Rosita, a little consciously picturesque in green corduroy, realised that Mrs. Wynnington Temple, who was all wrong with an Oriental background, would be equally unsuited to a setting of lilac and hydrangea chintz. It was difficult to fit her in anywhere. And it was tiresome when people refused to be fitted.

Rosita pulled herself up with a start. Why, she had always refused herself! Ah, but that was different. Though the landscape had invariably been uncongenial to her, she had never been a blot upon it. She had submitted—now she came to think of it—rather gracefully.

"I like the child," Mrs. Wynnington Temple was saying, "I like her very much." And Rosita became aware that they were talking of Marina. Once more she told herself that she must try and cure this deplorable tendency to carry on a conversation without noticing what it was about.

"Oh, she's a darling," said Rosita hastily, "and so attractive and clever."

"It is nice," said Mrs. Wynnington Temple, "that she has got you."

"Oh, we're *great* friends." She was conscious of extreme fatuity and looked resentfully at her guest. Really it was too bad how some people made one talk like this. She knew perfectly well that she was being told, without too much subtlety, that Marina was making a little fool of herself over Wynnington, and needed maternal advice. Only, of course, such things were not said openly, and one had therefore to wear a tired smile and agree—almost affectionately—to everything.

"She is such an entertaining little thing," faltered Rosita, nobly resisting a longing to make a movement—just a little movement—indicative of bringing the visit to an end.

"We must find her some nice young men."

But this was too much! It agreed far too exactly with all that Rosita herself thought. She did not want to be taught her business by this small, determined woman, even if she *was* married to one of the best-known profiles in London.

"I don't believe in arranging these things," said Rosita. Her right hand was hidden between the sofa cushions, which she was pinching fiercely: she was frightened, as always happened when she spoke her mind, and her colour deepened, but she looked the other full in the face. She was not so much defending Marina as herself. Although her knees trembled, she was saying in effect: 'I defy you to alarm me: no woman in a hat like yours has any business to be intimidating. Go away and mind your own business.'

But of course Wynnington Temple *was* her business: there was the rub. But surely they were not paying Marina the compliment of taking her seriously? The thing was grotesque.

'I *will* get up,' declared Rosita, and left the sofa to light a wholly unnecessary lamp. "How the evenings are drawing in," she said aloud, and, with her back turned, favoured the Chinese god on the mantelpiece with a most reprehensible wink.

Mrs. Wynnington Temple, perhaps a shade more formal than before, took her departure soon after.

"Was I trite?" demanded Rosita of a surprised Godfrey. "Oh, ye gods and little fishes, was I!"

He looked amused: he did not know this side of his wife very well, and he found her indignation attractive.

"Well, darling," he said, "you'll have to return the call, and after that you needn't bother about them."

"I've a good mind to take you with me," she threatened.

"Why should you always escape these frightful ordeals? Your presence would at least put a stop to small talk. You can discuss Spanish history, or Chinese ceramics, or the superiority of the East over the Western civilisation. In fact, you can be as clever as you like, so long as I am not again compelled to agree with the suggestion that the country always looks pretty when the leaves are turning, and that living here must be a great change after London."

"Poor darling," said Godfrey, stifling a little yawn as he flung another log on the fire and slowly dusted his fingers. "I ought to have come in while she was still here. It *is* too bad that you should have had to do it all alone. Where was Marina?"

"Out with the boys. They all go out and leave me to it," said Rosita, determined, now that she had an audience, to make the most of her plight.

"Too bad," he repeated, "but, of course, they're very young. And very much afraid of people. They take after me in that respect."

"But I also am afraid," exclaimed Rosita; "I'm terrified. And, you must admit, Godfrey, that the spectacle of six frightened people in one house is extremely ridiculous. Even the servants know it: that's why they gave notice. They think they can do anything with us."

"In which case one wonders that they didn't stay."

"Oh no," said Rosita emphatically, "they despise us. They might perhaps have a sneaking respect for Benedict, who is the most autocratic of the lot of us, but he is a Socialist and would only exercise discipline and authority over his betters. Which is confusing."

"The boy's an ass," said Godfrey comfortably. "Do you think you can overcome your feelings of trepidation sufficiently, dearest, to ring the bell for tea?"

It was a pity, Rosita presently reflected, that she had so little time to sort out her thoughts—her possibly trivial but

nevertheless apparently important thoughts. Had, for example, Mrs. Wynnington Temple patronised, snubbed or otherwise intended to humiliate her, or was it simply her manner? These things were so difficult. There had been the moment when, waiting for a lull in her guest's conversation, in order to ask whether she smoked cigarettes, Rosita, balancing the box and a little helplessly distraught, had finally not mentioned cigarettes at all, but said something tame about tulips. Mrs. Wynnington Temple had looked at her—a rather difficult look. But surely they had been discussing gardens? Or was Rosita lagging several subjects behind? Now she would never know. It was hard that doubt should creep so often and so insistently into her social activities. She had had half a lifetime in which to acquire ease. Perhaps the trouble was that she had too much respect for people. She was always comparing them with herself—to her own disadvantage.

'I ought not to care,' thought Rosita, rolling her sleeves up to the elbow and flinging her bare arms among the soapsuds in the lavatory basin. 'It's absurd to suffer so much discomfort.' But really she had no time even for these vague resolutions. There were her new silk vests to wash, and the little cardboard discs attached to them to read. When one was married to a husband with a household of eight and an inadequate income, one no longer unpacked large snowy hampers of linen. One squeezed sad, limp strips of wet silk, and long dejected wet stockings: and next morning one saw them in the kitchen, dangling across the line, and one hoped that the slight smell of fried onion which clung about the room would not continue indefinitely.

"In my last place," said Cook disapprovingly—for she too had been asked to help, and all those defiant, red-checked tea-cloths, those square, formidable dusters, were her work—"in my last place everything was sent out."

"Oh I *know*," sighed poor Rosita, "and in mine . . .

that is to say, in my father's house. But times have changed, Cook. They really have. Everything is changing. It's so interesting." But she had to write the orders very quickly after that: the silence was so terrific. And then her pen ran dry, and she had to borrow Cook's, which was infinitely superior, and lent with a very grudging air.

"Castle puddings," wrote Rosita, almost passionately. They sounded traditional and safe. "I like a lemon flavouring," she faltered, and fairly bolted from the kitchen before the wide expanse of Cook's most annoying face.

'A month from to-day,' mused Rosita at the basin, 'she and Walker will be gone. Actually a month is such a little time. I should find it easier to realise this if I did not think of it in terms of a daily ordeal before a blank book on a scrubbed deal table, with a clean but indubitably damp floor beneath one's slippers. And—above all else—I should agree more readily to the relativity of time if I did not remember how entirely smileless and how strangely episcopal Cook always looks.'

"Rosita?"

"My dear?" She turned in some relief to see Marina hovering at the door.

"How did you get on with Mrs. Wynnington Temple?"

Rosita glanced at her interlocutor, and decided to be a little grand. "Very well," she said. "I like her very much."

Marina flushed. "She does get away with it, doesn't she? One would hardly believe that she was once a barmaid. Unless, of course, one happened to notice her hands."

"Do you know," said Rosita carefully, shaking out a silk vest, "I don't think I believe that story."

"Well," in a burst of honesty, "I don't think I do, either. But her father really did keep an inn and served beer to the villagers."

"It's an excellent calling."

"Oh, I know, but . . ." Marina fiddled with the door-

handle. "Well, dash it all, Rosita, he knows everybody and goes everywhere, and it must be rather difficult for him sometimes."

"Why?" Rosita was determined to be unhelpful.

"You know perfectly well *why*," said her stepdaughter sulkily.

"I know this much: that Mrs. Wynnington Temple is content to be herself: she dresses abominably, talks incessantly about gardens, and carries a certain amount of the soil in her nails. But she is never artificial. If barmaid she once was—which, I repeat, I doubt—she is now a genuine, downright countrywoman. I cannot imagine her ever pretending to be anything else. But I gather, Marina my dear, that Mr. Wynnington Temple's rôles are as many off as on the stage."

Marina's clear eyes glowed with indignation. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Rosita, feeling a little uncomfortable, as was so often the case when she wanted to speak the unvarnished truth, "that down here he plays the county—not even the country—gentleman: and in London the man about town: and with the Rector of this parish he is the simple, charitable and rather engaging Christian: and with his lady friends . . ."

"I *hate* you!" spat the shrill little voice at the door. "I have quite changed my mind: I detest and despise you!"

'Dear me,' thought Rosita disconsolately, 'how articulate and un-English, and quite definitely unfortunate. But really, after what the boys have insinuated, and Godfrey hinted at, and after all the tales one has heard in London, it *was* really my duty. One must remember that to all intents and purposes, this is my daughter.' But alone in the sprinkled bathroom, which smelt so depressingly of soap-suds and acid-wet silk, she was not in love with her duty.

At dinner that evening the children were hostile and

silent. Fortunately Godfrey did not notice it: his present concern was for Punchinello, who moped visibly. The spaniel lay partly under the table, thereby greatly impeding the irate Walker, and sighed deeply at intervals.

Rosita pretended not to hear: she knew perfectly well that the dog associated her with his banishment to a basket in the passage, and she was determined to ignore his complaints: it was a nice basket and a nice passage. Punch had nothing to complain of at all. Sooner or later, Rosita felt sure, someone would say that dogs were creatures of habit: and if that *did* happen she would be obliged to remark, rather tartly, that she was a dog-lover herself, but that there were limits. She could not imagine a more trite conversation, and when it happened it sounded even worse than she expected. Aldous was the culprit: he was leaning over to pull Punch's ears and he mumbled a little, but Rosita, almost as if she knew her part, took her cue at once.

"I am a dog-lover," she began, and got through her speech hastily. She felt flushed and flustered. Benedict and Marina smiled at one another, and Hugh said:

"If someone will now quote Madame de Staël we shall be completely happy."

Godfrey, who had been looking puzzled, suddenly changed his expression and jerked his head towards the door. "You're impertinent," he said sharply. "Clear out!"

Hugh's small face seemed to shrink: he laid down his spoon and fork, and pushed back his chair slowly, staring with wide eyes at his father.

"Go on," said Godfrey, "leave the room!"

A most uncomfortable silence followed Hugh's exit. The half-consumed helping of chocolate shape on his plate, the crumpled table-napkin beside it, seemed to prolong the episode.

"These disciplinary methods," observed Benedict coolly, "are something new, aren't they?"

To everyone's surprise Godfrey's fist crashed on the table. "I've had enough of this," he said, his large, mild face suffused with a pale pink flush, his eyes prominent with anger. "I don't know what the devil is the matter with the lot of you, but I do know that I'll have civility and better manners. If you all imagine that you are being clever . . ."

"Only under duress," explained Marina.

Godfrey glared at her. "You're as much out of hand as the boys," he declared, "and I warn you something's going to be done about it. Something's going to be done about all of you, and extremely soon. Meantime you will be kind enough to hold your tongues, unless you can overcome this burning desire for would-be clever conversation. And now, for heaven's sake, let us continue this meal in peace."

Peace was an optimistic estimate, but certainly a silence prevailed. Rosita, quite tired of staring desperately at her dessert plate, terminated the ordeal at the first possible moment. She wondered if she should ever like the scent of tangerine skin again. Sadly, she went into the drawing-room, followed by Godfrey and Aldous. The others had disappeared. It was obvious that Godfrey was still extremely annoyed. So seldom did he get ruffled that he was doing the thing thoroughly.

"Father," said Aldous, limping over to the fireplace and carefully ignoring Rosita, "Father, I want to ask you if you'll let me go as a pupil to Dan Greenway at Whitegates Farm, as soon as possible. I've seen him, he's ready to take me for moderate fees, and there *is* a future. He's the most successful chicken farmer in the county."

"What's all this?" demanded Godfrey. He had heard, but he wanted to gain time.

Patently Aldous repeated his request. "Greenway's a sound chap," he said, "simple, you know, a regular countryman, but he knows his job, and he's worked up no end of a trade."

"Greenway," repeated Godfrey slowly, and with an air of long-suffering. "I've met him, I think. An elderly simple in leggings, Rosita. The kind of person who wears a small tweed hat, and leans against gates, talking of hen-roosts. If I remember rightly, he has a large, red, and quite excessively amiable face. And he was," continued Godfrey, his distaste unconcealed, "extremely jocose."

Rosita laughed, but she hoped it was a kind, a sympathetic laugh which told Aldous that, while she appreciated Godfrey's humour, she also saw her stepson's point of view. But when she glanced at Aldous she had quickly to glance away again. The boy looked so baffled, helpless and angry!

"My dear good fellow," Godfrey was continuing, "the idea is quite fantastic. Here you are, with some considerable ability to paint. You could easily earn your living by teaching, and during the holidays you might attempt some not too ambitious work with the idea of lending to an exhibition. Also, you could probably try your skill at illustrating. In fact, you have a profession to your hand. I'm a poor man, and I must say I'm thankful that you're relatively easy to place. I've no objection to paying fees for you at an art school for a year or so, but after that I shall expect you to show some initiative. But chicken-farming! I can't imagine what put the idea in your head."

Aldous prodded the carpet with the rubber-tipped stick. "I like country-life in England," he muttered. "If it wasn't for my leg I'd have loved farming."

"Not in this climate, old man. Far too many hazards." Godfrey was looking concerned: the boy's reference to his handicap struck him as being pathetic. "Come," he said, "you're a clever chap with your brush. Surely you like the work?"

"As a hobby. Unless," stammered Aldous, getting very warm and disturbed, "unless one is a genius I don't think it's a man's profession."

"Teaching," returned his father, a trifle curtly, "is certainly a man's profession." And he looked at Rosita, who said quickly:

"One of the finest in the world."

"It's different for you," mumbled Aldous.

"Why is it different for me?"

"I—I'm not clever. The others may be; I think you all are. I'm not."

"You're *very* gifted," interposed Rosita. "You have, anyhow, one outstanding talent."

"I see nothing the matter with your general ability," said Godfrey. "You've always shown application and industry." He sounded a little smug, as though he rather enjoyed talking like a schoolmaster. Yet Rosita admired him: she considered that he was being patient and just.

But Aldous, staring at them silently, rejected their consolation: he did not want to be told that he was talented or clever. He wanted to be regarded smilingly, even indulgently, as a slow, typically English young countryman. He wanted thick crusts of soil to form round his misshapen boot, he wanted his hands to grow hard, and his nostrils to be filled with the smell of chicken food and scratched earth. Already he saw himself stumping over the dusty runs with their earthenware pitchers of water, their sprinkling of moulted feathers, their clusters of attentive hens at the netting. . . .

But, staring at his elders, he despaired of making them understand. It was so often the other way about, they who advised common sense and commerce, and youth which argued brilliantly for art's sake, that the irony of the thing dismayed him. And somehow he felt that the presence of Rosita added insult to injury. Tacitly she was supporting Godfrey, for she had said no word on Aldous' own behalf. If she had not been there, if there had been no Rosita, would an unsupported Godfrey have

been quite so adamant? Aldous doubted it: this, then, was what marriage did for a man. This was what it did for his children.

7

"WELL," declared Marina, "it amounts to this. She's not going to stand by us, and Father's so cosy he thinks he can have his own way in everything. Therefore we shall have to look after ourselves."

"And how, may one ask," enquired Benedict, "are we to do that? We haven't a penny piece between us."

The children were sprawling on the loggia, idly watching the afternoon sun warming the half-naked branches of the trees. Already the hills had a grey look of winter.

Hugh shivered. "My bones have ached ever since we set foot in this country," he said.

"They ached before that," Aldous reminded him. "It's no use blaming the climate—which, in my view, is very much maligned—because you happened to contract rheumatic fever abroad."

"You know," said Benedict lazily, "I think you should take to reading Law. You are always coming out with some just, apt, and, if you'll forgive my saying so, singularly exasperating remark."

"Might I recommend the profession of public hangman for yourself?" retorted Aldous with an unwonted dash of temper. "You are for ever stringing people up, and watching their last kicks with enthusiasm."

Marina stared at her two brothers: they so seldom fell out, and then so mildly, that this was an event, and no pleasant one.

"Look," she said hastily, "we're all feeling rattled and I'm sure it's no wonder; but the people to pitch into are the

older generation. Did you know that I tackled Father on the subject of the stage and met with a flat refusal?"

"What's his objection?" demanded Benedict.

"Ask me another. Some nonsense about the city of Babylon."

"It's not *altogether* nonsense," began Aldous anxiously and stopped himself. He was not in the least anxious to make himself unpleasant, and already repented of his sharp rejoinder to his brother. "Provided that she could find somewhere suitable to live," he continued, "I don't see why she shouldn't go, Benedict; do you?"

"I think it's lunacy to stop her. If he does, she'll wait until she's eighteen—which, after all, is little more than a year—and then join the first tenth-rate company of strolling players she comes across; won't you, Marina?"

She nodded. "Certainly I shall, and at the first possible moment."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you were a success," declared Benedict. "Your emotions are shallow and facile, your sense of humour is infantile, your powers of assimilation resemble the boa constrictor and you've a memory like a parrot." He dodged the fir-cone Marina flung at him and continued: "Yes, I really believe I see an actress in you."

"So do other people," she said complacently. She was not at all put out by her favourite brother's comments. She did not know that he meant them: she merely supposed that he was teasing her.

Since it was apparent that by 'other people' she meant Wynnington Temple the boys were silent. If Marina chose to take herself seriously it was her own affair.

"I may have to do something a little formidable on my own account," sighed Benedict. "With Father in this unreasonable state of mind it's unlikely that he'll agree to let me leave Oxford and really start writing. If he's against chicken-farms and the boards, one may be sure that he'll

object to Grub Street." Here he paused and glanced at the youngest member of the family. "You're very silent, Hugh. Do your lost chances fill you with a gloom too deep for speech?"

The small boy's grin was faintly malicious. "On the contrary, I have nothing but praise for Father and—I may add—nothing but love for our stepmother. I'm not going to school, I'm to have a tutor."

"What?" exclaimed Aldous. "You don't mean to tell me they've given way?"

"I do. I've had a long talk with both of them."

"Oh well," said Benedict, "in that case there's hope for us. Incidentally, in this one particular case I think they're mistaken, but that's by the way."

But Marina looked gloomy. "Father spoke to me only this morning: I'm convinced he won't change his mind."

"He ought never to have changed it about Hugh," declared Aldous indignantly. "It's monstrous."

"Sour grapes," said his youngest brother blandly. "I win, the hens lose. Really I think you should show a more magnanimous spirit, Aldous."

The other was hot. "You don't know what you're talking about, you little fool. Of the lot of us you're the only one who's had the chance to get a first-class education and learn to behave like a conventional member of society, and you refuse it, you deliberately refuse it! You make me sick!"

Benedict looked at him interestedly. "You're very vehement. Why not attack me? Oxford, they say, offers some opportunities for education and I'm rejecting them. Does that stick in your gizzard?"

Aldous' large honest face streamed with perspiration. "Yes," he admitted, but a trifle less angrily, "it does, but I put down your failure to the fact that you've been compelled—as I have—to endure spasmodic teaching from a succession of bored tutors whose one idea was to get the job

over quickly. Naturally you can't settle down. You simply don't understand discipline and fixed rules."

"Do you?" demanded Benedict.

"Yes," said the other, growing even redder than before. "I do. It—it's different for me."

"Which is why he prefers cocks and hens to paints and crayons," said Marina. "Never mind, old man, you be a chicken farmer if you want to."

Aldous made no reply. It was easy to talk. Benedict and Marina might be clever enough to earn money at their chosen professions without serving an apprenticeship. But for him it was impossible.

"My tutor," Hugh was saying in his small, extremely calm voice, "is to be housed in the village."

"I don't want," said his eldest brother with sudden and most unaccustomed fury, "to hear a word about either of you." And seizing his stick he limped across the loggia, pushed furiously at the garden room door and went in.

Never had Aldous been so angry. It all seemed so desperately unfair. Why was it that he should be singled out for unfair treatment at the hands of circumstance? Why should such unfairness persist? He was lame, he was conventional, he was, if not precisely stupid, at least considerably less intelligent than the others. Before, it had never seemed to matter. But now he was aware of possible handicap. He could no longer compare the others' cosmopolitan brilliance with his own British worth, for was he not now refused the opportunity to follow what seemed to him an extremely British calling? There were, of course, hens in other countries, but surely they were markedly inferior? Painting was all very well, but if one were an artist, in Aldous' opinion one at once was labelled a Bohemian, which was next door to being a foreigner! "Why should I stand it?" he muttered, and was horrified to discover that he was nearly in tears. Snatching his cap from the hall chest, he

stumped out of the house and down the drive as fast as his lame leg would allow him. His colour was very high and his eyes fixed with anger: the placid Aldous was almost alarmed at his own temper.

By the time he reached the bottom of the road he was out of breath, and could do no more than wave his stick imperiously at the little red bus standing and snorting in front of 'The Dog and Partridge'.

The country-folk inside, and the conductor on the step, watched the distressed young man hastening painfully towards them, and made comfortable noises, indicative of pity, among themselves. They were sorry that he had a lame leg, and that he should have made himself so hot hurrying to catch the bus.

Aldous clambered in awkwardly and sat down with a grunt of relief. He had a long drive ahead of him, and plenty of time to cool before he saw Dan Greenway and told him of Godfrey's decision. But to his surprise he did *not* cool down, at least in mood. Indeed, with every mile his anger seemed to mount. The little bus lumbered past the sunny commons and the bland villages, past deep meadows and glowing woods, past little streams and broken footpaths, past square farms and small silent churches, past red-brick schools and open fields, past houses with high walls and cottages with washing lines festooned with cheerful garments. Aldous stared out of the window: he could not look enough. In China he had seen much that was beautiful, in South America a great deal that was strikingly lovely, but to him this English countryside in early autumn had an unequalled glory. The leaves were burning, there was smoke in the grass, there was cloud hiding the hills: he could have painted it although he could not have said it. With ease he could have recaptured that sense of brittle flaming leaves, of greyness mingled with the green, of shrouded outline, of cold blue and thin pale gold.

But he did not want to paint it. And presently he climbed out of the bus, and made his way stiffly across a bridle-track to a pair of white-painted gates. Here he paused and rested. The path led downwards to a smallish shack-like dwelling with a thatched roof and an open door. There was no one about.

Aldous wiped his hot face and went on. Presently he had a view of the farm, and, gazing at the foolish feathered backs of many birds, he grasped his stick more tightly and struck at a stone with a fresh rise of indignation.

"Well, that's funny!" said a high-pitched elderly voice, and a man came out of the house to greet him. He was a fat, middle-sized creature, with a big, round, good-humoured face. His forehead was bald and he wore, pushed back until it became a halo, a battered felt hat. His tweed jacket was of very old-fashioned cut with the sleeves rolled up at the cuff. His breeches and black leather leggings were, however, surprisingly neat, and his general appearance, although a little peculiar, was by no means unpleasing.

"You're put out," he went on with a comical little chuckle, gleeful and—it must be confessed—rather foolish, "you're annoyed. Now don't say you aren't, because you are."

"I'm very much annoyed, Mr. Greenway," said Aldous, not in the least disturbed by his friend's method of greeting. "I've come to tell you my father won't let me take up the work."

"It doesn't do," said the other, who obviously preferred to deal with one idea at a time, "to hit stones about. Someone might be injured, you know. Of course young men are high-spirited. Or it's ill-humour. With you I think it *was* ill-humour. But that, again, is natural. I daresay you were put out. Something happened, perhaps. When I am ill-humoured," continued Mr. Greenway, "I chop wood. It's a wonderful cure."

"Father," continued Aldous, urgently, "flatly refuses to let me come to you."

Dan Greenway dropped his head to one side and sucked his thumb. "Mr. Daleham," he said placidly, "is that so? What a pity."

"He wants me to become an artist."

"At what?" enquired Dan. "My sister says I'm an artist at chicken-farming. Well, I think I am, and there's no reason why you shouldn't be."

"I've no money," said Aldous shortly. "My allowance wouldn't stretch to the fees. Besides, Father might stop it."

"Fees?" said Dan in his slow speculative fashion, and cocked his battered hat to the side in order to scratch his head. "Well, I don't know. My sister understands these things better than I do. It was she who thought of a pupil: we've never had one before. But fees, now. Let me see. I never was good at figures, were you?"

"Yes," said Aldous—"well, I mean, not bad. Mathematics and drawing are in a queer sort of way allied. I rather like figures."

"Could you keep accounts?" demanded Dan. "They take me half the night, and my sister says she can't help me because she has enough to do with the housekeeping and the rest of it. Now, if I had a pupil who could keep accounts, and drive the car, and do the rounds perhaps, and come with me to the market, and generally give me a helping hand, why, then I'd say he'd earn his board and lodging. And he could learn the business, you know, by getting up early and going to bed late, and following me about." Dan beamed and nodded. "That's a notion now, isn't it? I'll consult with my sister, but I've no doubt she'll agree. She's often said it fretted her to see me poring over the accounts till all hours, when a clever young man could tot them up in no time."

Aldous, quite pale with excitement, was staring at him in

amazement. "You mean, Mr. Greenway, you'd take me without fees?"

"Well, we'll ask Dorcas," said Dan, and promptly led the way into the shack. Here everything was remarkably trim: the warming-pan on the wall shone with an air of indubitable welcome: the brick floor was ruddy, scrubbed and spotless: a fire of fir-cones crackled in the deep hearth.

"You wait here," recommended Dan, and raised the latch of the inner door leading to the kitchen. He had scraped his boots very carefully on entering, and had hung up his hat upon a hook in the wall with an air of righteous care. He looked like a grotesque overgrown child, and his mien was a trifle apologetic as he poked his bald head round the corner into his sister's domain.

"Dorcas," he said, "here's young Daleham in the parlour."

"I'm coming," said a comfortable voice, and at once a little round-faced woman appeared. She was broad and red-cheeked like her brother, but her expression was more decisive and her little shrewd eyes had an air of quiet concentration. She wore a bright blue woollen frock, with a large grey apron tied round her waist, and her plump arms were bare to the elbow.

"I've been making a cake," she said as she shook hands with Aldous. "We've a guest coming down to-night, and if I know little madam I'll get no baking done to-morrow! Sit down, Mr. Daleham. What a beautiful afternoon!"

Aldous looked at her. Somehow he felt that neither of these people noticed his lame leg. They knew about it, of course, but they were not thinking about it. Miss Greenway had not told him to sit down because he was tired, but because she was hospitable. And, still staring, he suddenly blurted out all his troubles.

When he had done, Dan had *his* say, and Dorcas Greenway just sat still and listened until they had finished.

"Well," she said at last, "I don't believe in thwarting young people. If you would like to come to us, Mr. Daleham, we'll be glad to have you. You'll learn the trade and my brother will be the richer for an assistant."

Aldous was no longer pale: he kept getting more flushed every moment. "I say," he stammered, "it's simply wonderful. Father can't possibly object to that. And I—I'll work like anything. Shall you want references? We've not been here very long, but I am sure one or two people would speak for me."

Dorcas smiled. "There, my dear," she said, "don't you worry about that. We know something of you—news travels fast in the country—and your face is enough reference for us."

"I have," said Dan thoughtfully, "a very large alarm clock, which goes off at six o'clock punctually. Does his face tell you, Dorcas, that he will get up when that clock rings?"

"Certainly," she replied.

Her brother looked relieved. "My sister is the brains here," he said; "I haven't much of a head-piece. I daresay it's living so much among the hens. They're very foolish creatures."

"Don't you believe my brother," said Miss Greenway stoutly; "he's too fond of underrating himself. I often tell him he couldn't have made this business the success it is if he was the fool he makes out. Brains indeed! In my opinion too much store is set on cleverness. We had an elder brother and much good his brains did him!"

"He made a name for himself," said Dan.

"He may have," she retorted, "but he did no good in spite of it. Ambition was his undoing. He was so anxious to make himself a great man that he forgot to set about making himself a good one."

"Maybe he's leisure to attend to that now," suggested her brother.

"That's not reverent, Dan." She turned to Aldous, "my elder brother's dead," she explained, "and I don't care to hear the dead ill spoken of, even when it's one of our own family." Feeling that perhaps she had put this a little strangely, she added: "He made a marriage we couldn't approve of. But his wife's dead too, poor thing. And it's their daughter who's coming to stay with us." Here a thought seemed to strike her and she looked shrewdly at Aldous. "I warn you," she said, "our niece is a regular little madam. You had better pay no attention to her."

"He'll be too busy with the hens," said Dan.

8

"My whole life blighted," said Marina tragically, "for a whim."

"Don't talk like a novelette," advised Wynnington Temple. He was pacing his smooth lawn beside his young guest, listening indulgently to her troubles. "Good heavens," he went on, "do you suppose you're the first stage-struck young woman to meet opposition from her family?"

"No, but that doesn't make it any better for me. Father says I am to learn domestic economy: I'm to attend classes, if you please, at Redbury. And I may have elocution lessons if I like. What," demanded the tearful Marina, "do you think of that?"

"I think you are a remarkably fortunate little woman," he returned coolly; "you should be extremely grateful to your father. You will learn to toss a pancake with the best, and you will be taught how to pitch your wretched little pipe."

She gazed at him dumbly, her large eyes damp and adoring.

Wynnington Temple looked at her and pulled a face.

"Don't expect any sympathy from me," he said; "I approve of your father's action. I've known girls who've gone to London on their own, and worked themselves to the bone, and turned into tolerable actresses, but I'd never counsel you to do it. You've got gifts, but I doubt if you've got guts."

"I have!" cried Marina indignantly. "Indeed I have!"

"Possibly," he returned unperturbed, "but I think it improbable. Anyhow, I consider that you are better at home."

It amused him to see how crestfallen she was. It was good fun to tease little Marina: she had high spirits and would often laugh with him: only lately she had grown a trifle serious. He supposed it was the usual story: she was falling in love with him: they all did it, sooner or later. And really it was not his fault. Besides, it was quite unimportant, and served as a pleasant diversion between plays. While he was resting he nearly always found himself more easily beguiled than when he was busy. His work always came first, he had a duty to himself and a duty to the public—in that order. Nothing was allowed to interfere with his sense of duty.

The critics in their annoying way described him as a great popular actor. In his opinion they might have left it at 'great'. Frankly, he did not know anyone to touch him in his own particular line. And he was so versatile and not only in his art! Why, in private life, he was the staid country gentleman with a taste for ornithology and a nice little amateur interest in architecture! He liked riding too, in a leisurely picturesque fashion, and enjoyed the interest he created ambling about the common on a particularly well-conducted grey horse.

His fads were well known and heartily approved by his rustic neighbours. For he expressed himself strongly against the progressive manners of the modern girl, refused to have a telephone in his house, and had steadfastly resisted all attempts to make him buy a motor-car.

Mr. Temple liked being considered a character in the country. What did it matter if he were quite different in London? Whose business was it if in Mayfair he even benefited from the modern girl's emancipation, kept a much-used telephone in his luxury flat, and a smart little *coupé* in the garage?

Mr. Temple was not in the least conscious of hypocrisy. "One must," he often said, "be all things to all men. Variety is extraordinarily interesting."

And Mrs. Temple, to whom these remarks were sometimes addressed, was not so foolish as to contradict him.

Poor Marina had no idea that she was making herself ridiculous. She was not able to observe her foolishness, since the disability of being in love caused her to see only one object at a time. In her opinion there was no one in the world so completely enchanting as Mr. Wynnington Temple. It was, perhaps, the only opinion the ill-sorted pair had in common.

"I shall feel like a schoolgirl again," she complained. "In fact I shall probably feel worse than ever before, because I never went to school, you know, and when I was bored with my governesses in South America I used to pretend that I heard someone firing off a pistol—it really happened sometimes—and then we rushed to the window, you see, and Hugh and I cried 'Long live the revolution', while our governesses had hysterics in the background."

"For which you should have been soundly beaten and sent to bed," declared Wynnington Temple. "What obnoxious children you must have been!"

"We were considered," said Marina complacently, "rather amusing."

"I should not have shared the opinion," he assured her.

"Well," she sighed, "I'm inclined to regard those as the good old days. I really am. Father didn't take half as much interest in us then as he does now. Of course, if he did it

properly it wouldn't be so bad. But he doesn't. And Rosita simply aids and abets him. All the same," and she began to giggle, "my eldest brother has managed to outwit them. He packed a bag last week, and marched off to Whitegates' Farm, if you please, leaving a note behind him. Aldous of all people! Rosita cried, and Father behaved like a parent in a book. But next morning they were more philosophical. They said Aldous was a fool and that they gave it a couple of months."

Wynnington Temple, listening idly to her chatter, walked slowly round his beautiful garden, and felt a little amused to think that she supposed him interested in her family. She was a comical child, with no sense of proportion at all! Why in the world should he care two straws what young Daleham did, or how his father behaved about it? He had a large circle of friends in whom he might well be presumed to take some interest; he had an even larger circle of acquaintances who in their turn might claim, perhaps, a little of his attention.

But this kitten of a girl—like so many other kittens—was a newcomer to the scene, and really her belongings were of no sort of importance to him at all. And he glanced down at her with a prick of impatience: she was telling him some story of Hugh—he caught a sentence here and there—and she was laughing and looking up at him mischievously. But behind her laughter he saw the tenderness, the vulnerability, the untried shy ardour, and his mood changed. No, she was emphatically *not* like the other kittens. She was at once shyer and more daring; more sophisticated and less knowing; wilder and less adventurous.

"You'd better pay attention to your elocution lessons," he said, abruptly interrupting her, and not caring that he spoke at random; "you've the makings of a captivating little actress."

She was so surprised that she stood still on the grass to stare at him. He had never said as much before.

"Oh!" she gasped, "I can bear not going to London and— and everything if you really think that."

Temple was touched. He was used to flattery of every variation, but this child was palpably sincere. She had genuine tears in her eyes and the fact pleased him. Indeed the whole episode pleased him. Here they were, in a secluded part of the garden, on a warm October afternoon, and she was looking at him as if he had deliberately given her happiness, instead of merely having said the first thing which came into his head.

"Of course I think it," he said and linked his arm in hers, spreading his fingers within her own, "and you're going to work hard just to please me, aren't you?"

"Oh *yes*," breathed Marina, choked with bliss. "I will, indeed I will."

"Dear little woman!" said Wynnington Temple, and made love to her with as much conviction as if he were facing a packed house.

Marina's cheeks were flaming. He had kissed her! He was famous, he was popular in two continents, he was, in short, *news*, and he had actually kissed her!

She was terribly embarrassed: she was even glad when he stopped, although it had been so delightful.

And then, quite suddenly, she remembered Mrs. Temple. And for a moment she wished she were back on the loggia teasing and being teased by the boys.

"This is our little secret," Wynnington Temple was saying easily, "known only to you and me. Some time or other, when you are over at Redbury, taking your lesson, I may find myself there as well, and if you are very good I shall invite you out to tea."

She thanked him incoherently. It was, of course, a splendid invitation. She wished in a way he had not made it sound quite so condescending, but then, of course, he *was* very important.

But, as she walked home, she felt more chaotic than happy. Somehow, although it had been wonderful it was at the same time something of an anti-climax. It had all happened a little too easily, and in a queer way she felt that he had unwittingly betrayed his whole attitude to her.

It would never do, of course, to let him know how differently she felt. She had almost worshipped him when she had poured out her ambition to become an actress, and listened to his explanation of how hard a life lay before her. Then he had seemed aloof, wise and inspiring. She had been delighted when he bullied, criticised, and occasionally praised her. Because he showed interest in her, she naïvely supposed him equally interested in her brothers, and, indeed, the whole family.

She had few other friends herself, and she had no idea that Wynnington Temple was a past-master at making every woman of his acquaintance believe that she was the one person in the world who interested him.

Now and then he allowed her glimpses of the enviable society to which he belonged, and sometimes, when he called well-known people by their first names, she was tremendously impressed.

But now everything seemed just a little different. He was as grand as ever, of course, but in a way, a very uncomfortable way, she thought less of him, although she loved him more.

She felt that the secret of her devotion, which she had guarded so carefully, had been known to him all the time. That in itself did not matter so much. What rankled was the fact that he should rate it so lightly.

Perhaps she was too young to know precisely what she *did* want. But anyhow she had not dreamt that he would make love to her, nor cause the thought of Mrs. Temple to become so embarrassing.

"I wish I could tell Benedict," she muttered, "he's much

the easiest of the family to talk to. I—I wish I could have *someone's* advice."

Hurrying up the road—for she had a queer desire to get back to her familiar surroundings as quickly as possible—she saw the one-horse fly from the station amble past her. On the roof were two battered-looking suit-cases, and inside the carriage was a red-headed young man with a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles on a very supercilious nose. 'Who in the world is that?' thought Marina. 'It looks as though he were making for our house.'

By the time she arrived at the top of the lane and had turned into her own drive, the fly, minus passenger and luggage, was on its return journey, the driver with a clay pipe between his teeth and the horse trotting to a slackened rein.

Considerably mystified, Marina went through the gates, and presently saw Walker, in the porch, talking to the red-haired young man who had a suit-case in each hand.

"I understood, sir," she was saying severely, "that you was expected next week. I'm sorry, but all the family's out."

"Perhaps I could help," suggested Marina as she came up.

The young man turned towards her, and, being hatless, made her a stiff little bow.

"Mr. Daleham has engaged me as tutor to one of his sons," he announced, "and I understood that I was to arrive to-day. I went to an address in the village, which he had given me, but I was told I was a week too soon. So I came on here, only to learn the same thing. However I think there must be some mistake. I've got Mr. Daleham's letter with me."

Marina took it from him. "That's not Father's writing, it's Rosita's—my stepmother's, I mean. Father's signed it, of course. But it's she who must have muddled up the dates. Certainly, we all expected you to arrive next week."

The young man raised his eyebrows. "Well, that's hardly my fault, is it?"

"Nor mine," flashed Marina. They glared at each other.

Walker looked pained. "I don't know whether you'd care to wait until Mr. Daleham comes in?"

"Certainly," said the young man grandly. "I've no intention of going back until I've seen Mr. Daleham." He put down his suit-cases and followed Walker across the hall into the library.

Marina stared after him. What an impossible person he was with his arrogant airs! He had stared at her quite coldly and not smiled at all. She was not in the least accustomed to such treatment. Excited and overwrought by the episode in Wynnington Temple's garden, she felt abominably restless and experienced a longing to put this indifferent young man in his place. Accordingly she waited until Walker had returned to the kitchen quarters, and then marched into the library herself.

There she found the young man stalking round the bookshelves with some show of interest. He turned round at her approach and looked put out. Marina had the uncomfortable impression that he did not in the least want her company.

"I don't suppose my father will be very long," she said, and, with her chin very high, offered him the cigarette-box.

"Thanks: I only smoke a pipe."

His air was so distant, even unfriendly, that she allowed herself a cool little smile of amusement at his refusal, and, continuing to smile, she examined him more closely. Yes, it was all perfectly in keeping! The tweeds, curls, shoulders, and general appearance of the conventional athlete! Only the horn spectacles rather spoiled the picture. She tried to think of something excessively crushing to say: she did not in the least appreciate his patent expectation that she would go away and leave him alone.

"I suppose you're in training?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Training?"

"I thought," she said sweetly, "that in this country undergraduates were always in training for something."

"Perhaps your knowledge of this country is a trifle limited."

"*Aren't* you an undergraduate?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Dear me," said Marina, all innocence. "I understood that my father particularly wished to engage a University man."

"I left Cambridge," said the young man irritably, "two years ago."

"Really? I shouldn't have thought it." She was delighted to have shaken him out of his annoying aloofness: it pleased her to observe that he appeared exasperated. The fact that he was extremely good-looking did not escape her either. Marina felt that she disliked him very much.

The young man glanced significantly at the book-shelves from which she had so wantonly distracted him. "Don't—er—don't let me detain you," he said; "I'm perfectly happy here on my own."

Unfortunately Marina had no ready retort. She considered that her guest was remarkably uncivil, but she was bound in honesty to admit that she had herself provoked him in a most unmannerly way. While she was debating how she should answer him, the young man coolly turned his back upon her and fell to examining the books once more.

Amazed at his audacity, Marina was undecided whether to leave the room with such dignity as she could muster, or remain with as much nonchalance as she could simulate. Both rôles seemed sufficiently difficult, and she was extremely relieved when she was saved the necessity of taking any action at all by the door being flung open and Rosita appearing, flushed and apologetic, in their midst.

"Mr. Rodwell," she exclaimed, "this is perfectly dreadful and it's all my fault!"

The young man, taking her outstretched hand, no longer looked offended and dignified. He was smiling and looking at Rosita as if he enjoyed the sight of her.

"I—I'm awfully sorry to have put you out," he said, "but the letter *does* say Tuesday and not Tuesday week, you know."

"My wife mustn't take it all upon herself," observed Godfrey as he came in. "I'm just as much to blame for confusing the dates. I'd booked you a room in the village, as you know, but Walker tells me you've been there, and they can't take you in."

"Not until the arranged date, sir."

"Couldn't Mr. Rodwell have Aldous' room just for the week?" suggested Rosita.

Marina, entirely neglected, longed to make a spirited protest. She was horrified at the thought of this cool young man staying under the same roof as herself. That he was to be Hugh's tutor seemed bad enough. However, she would probably be away at her classes while he was occupying the schoolroom—that was one comfort. There remained, however, the week in dispute, during which time he would undoubtedly take every meal with them. "The Dog and Partridge' has a room to let, I think," she remarked.

"Nonsense," returned Godfrey. "Naturally, we shall be delighted to have you here, Rodwell."

"Thanks very much, sir. I—I'm awfully sorry."

"We're very glad," said Rosita sweetly.

"*Are* we?" muttered Marina as she slipped out of the room. "They can speak for themselves. Really, there's no excuse for Father, he went up to London and interviewed the creature! I don't care how good his qualifications are, his manners are abominable. And I hate red hair."

Meeting Hugh in the passage upstairs, she greeted him

gloomily. "You're in for it, you poor thing. Your mutt of a tutor has arrived a week too soon, and we're putting him up, if you please!"

"What's he like?" enquired Hugh anxiously.

"*Beastly*," said Marina with a surprising venom, "completely beastly."

"But, look here," he returned, much alarmed. "What's Father up to? He must have made all enquiries. Do tell me what you mean."

"Well," she said, taking a deep breath, and leaning against the broad window-sill, "he's young, painfully good-looking, and hopelessly conceited. His manners are frightful and he will *not* improve on acquaintance."

Hugh looked at her and cocked his head pertly. "Hum," he said, "I gather the gentleman didn't put himself out to please you. I'm not sure that I don't like him the better for it. It would be uncommonly awkward if you had an adorer on the premises. If I were you I shouldn't be piqued about it."

"Piqued!" repeated Marina shrilly, "*piqued* because an ill-bred young idiot insults me in our own drawing-room and then sucks up to the parents in the most sickening fashion imaginable . . ."

"Don't yell!" hissed Hugh in rapid warning as Rosita came happily up the stairs, leading Mr. Rodwell towards his room.

BENEDICT was feeling extremely bewildered and in a very poor humour. Openly, and at least several times a day, he told his friends that he could not imagine what the college authorities were up to. And his friends, who were not very numerous, were silent or sympathetic according to their kind.

And Benedict remained confused. Dispatched, by the adamant Godfrey, to Oxford at the beginning of term, he arrived wearing a flaming tie and carrying a notoriously Red newspaper. Nobody took any notice. Surprised, but not daunted, Benedict sat down to dinner in Hall and obligingly told the other first-year men all about Karl Marx. He was not contradicted. People, more shy than himself, listened politely. And when there was a pause someone began to talk about Cup-ties, and for the rest of the dinner the conversation remained hearty and athletic.

Benedict returned to his rooms very thoughtful. Men on his staircase came in, turned on his gramophone, and discussed modern music. Benedict steered them towards poetry and soon had the field to himself. Whereupon his friends, politely stifling their yawns, left early.

It was all very extraordinary. He came to the conclusion that society at the University was polite but not encouraging. It allowed you to do as you pleased, and left you alone.

'At this rate,' thought poor Benedict, 'I shall be here four years.' Whereupon, ever mindful of Shelley and only regretting a similar lack of persecution, he sat down and wrote a heated little pamphlet entitled 'Up the Republic!' This struck him as being very advanced and dangerous, and likely to ensure his receiving the indignant attention of authority.

He therefore caused his effort to be typed, and was then assailed by doubt. What book-seller would consent to expose for sale that which was not printed? It was useless, surely, to attempt to emulate Shelley too closely. What, then, was the best move? Doubtless the letter-boxes of dons and fellows.

Benedict spent a happy afternoon on a hired bicycle, riding through the town, knocking up authority and thrusting his typed sheets through protesting slits into wire cages.

'Now I'm done for,' he thought delightedly. 'I'll be sent down for certain.'

A day passed, and nothing happened. The powers that be were doubtless conferring. Extremely elated, he attempted a maiden speech at the Union, the subject being: "Is Christianity compatible with modern scientific discovery?"

Mindful of the importance of his rôle, Benedict side-tracked, not without skill, and delivered himself of some entirely irrelevant matter in which Russia, the brotherhood of Man, and the ineptitude of the ruling classes were mentioned very freely.

There was some slight, not entirely ironical, applause. The President was seen to smile. A young freshman whispered: "I say, where did you mug all that up?" And a second-year man invited Benedict to breakfast.

But nobody said what a dangerous fellow Daleham was, and as for the pamphlet, perhaps the dons and the fellows merely threw it into their waste-paper baskets, for nothing more was heard of it.

Benedict was bitterly disappointed. He attended lectures, and scribbled essays with ever-increasing gloom. Aldous wrote to him to say that chicken farming exceeded even his wildest dreams. "We have our ups and downs, of course," he explained, "but it's a grand life. The Greenways are simple and charming. They have a young niece staying with them."

Benedict crumpled the letter angrily. What did he care for chickens or young nieces? Aldous' complacency infuriated him. Nor was he any better pleased with Hugh's epistle.

"Mr. Rodwell," wrote his younger brother, "isn't half the fool he looks. He really likes teaching, which is more than can be said for our other tutors. His enthusiasm is quite touching: I feel almost sorry for him and am—you'll be surprised to hear—persuaded to work."

"Little brute!" muttered Benedict. He was fond of Hugh, but he did not like him to be pert and happy. Not being in the least happy himself, he crumpled up this letter, too, barely skimmed Rosita's archly cheerful note, and turned with relief to Marina.

"You in your exile," wrote that young woman, "are not more to be pitied than I am. Imagine, I go three times a week to Redbury, travelling by bus, too soon after an all too English breakfast. I learn, my dear, to dress a boiled shirt, to make pastry, to set a dinner-table. This is domestic economy. I also acquire by heart suitable passages from Shakespeare, Browning and Milton, and declaim them, in the presence of a batch of schoolgirls, before an unimpressed audience consisting of a stout old lady and a water-bottle. This is elocution.

"Mr. Temple has gone to London: Mr. Rodwell continues to darken our board: and Father has taken to calling our stepmother Zita. If this sort of thing goes on for long I shall do something desperate. What a curse it is that one cannot strike attitudes without money!

"Darling Benedict, *do* come home soon. At least we shall be companions in misfortune."

And this letter too went the way of the rest. He was sorry for Marina, but her troubles were trumpery as compared with his own. Nothing, he realised, short of flagrant disobedience to University rule was likely to terminate his career as an undergraduate. He might declare himself a rebel, flaunt a republican tie, and stuff the dons' letter-boxes with his pamphlets, and he would be met with no more than indulgence and neglect.

It was heart-breaking, for he had no taste for other sorts of insubordination, which struck him merely as being childish and tiresome.

His extreme preoccupation with the necessity for escape prevented him both from making friends and from regarding

the whole matter sensibly. He was only unhappy because he was lonely; only lonely because he wilfully elected to be self-centred. He was furious with his father, who had so suddenly and inexcusably asserted authority, and he was more angry still with Rosita, who, undoubtedly, was the cause of Godfrey's newly established discipline.

'He's supremely happy,' decided Benedict gloomily, 'and because he feels safe he's suddenly woken up to his responsibilities. He never felt safe with our mother; she had too much temperament, and so, for the sake of peace, he let things slide, which was convenient for us at the time. But if one had known that he was going to turn conventional at this hour of the day, one would have pleaded for different treatment. We should have asked to be sent away to school in order to get used to the artificialities of the life, and thus prepare ourselves for the next phase.' Here Benedict paused. He liked the sound of that; he wished someone were listening to him. He decided to put it down in his diary. Some time, ten or fifteen years hence, he might allow that diary to be published. And men would say: "The poet Daleham overcame incredible difficulties in order to become the great writer we acclaim to-day."

That would make his father sit up, and Rosita would very likely beg his pardon. He saw himself magnanimous but not too forgiving. "Certainly," he heard himself declare, "I have had my struggle."

But meantime here he was in a college sitting-room, cutting a lecture in order that he might meditate profitably upon the future.

He could not help wishing that someone would come in and talk to him. Here, in a city of young men, he had not got one real friend. Despite his incorrigible powers of conversation he was passionately shy, preoccupied, and nervous of being different from the undergraduates who came from public schools. Several people had made friendly

overtures to him but, perversely, he had repulsed them. He told himself that he preferred his mood of solitariness and melancholy. But it was not true. Used to the cheerful garrulity of his brothers and sister, he could almost have wept in the cold silence of his room.

And suddenly he leapt out of the chair into which he had flung himself, and began counting the money in his pockets. He had just under three pounds, a pawnable watch and an expensive overcoat. With so much capital it seemed ridiculous not to see the world.

Benedict packed his suitcases and walked out of the college buildings while the rest of the fraternity were lunching in Hall. It was so easy that he felt ashamed of not having done it before.

10

MILES RODWELL had made a discovery and he was pardonably proud of it. At present he was not prepared to share it with anyone else, chiefly for the reason that it was a delicate matter and might easily be shattered by revelation.

It concerned his small pupil, to whom he had taken instant and amused liking. Hugh's intelligence, and undisguised appetite for learning, delighted one who genuinely loved to teach. It was an agreeable revelation to the young man to find a boy who was neither bored nor careless, and whose precocious remarks were really worth listening to.

Naturally enough he found Hugh's air of lively impudence at times annoying, and further took care to discourage his tendency to talk for talking's sake. But always his reproofs were received very reasonably and even occasionally bore fruit. It was obvious that the pupil had a flattering confidence in the tutor's good sense, and this state of rather surprising mutual respect caused the avoidance of much friction.

The discovery was another matter altogether. Miles dared not reveal that he had stumbled upon it lest Hugh were frightened away from friendship and confidence. Briefly, it was the knowledge that the boy's dread of school was somehow inextricably tangled up with longing for it.

Miles, who had a sympathetic appreciation of the complex and confused workings of the adolescent mind, saw through Hugh's glib dismissal of school life as antipathetic to him, and probed beyond to the state of eager and fearful curiosity.

He knew that the boy had a semi-conscious longing for the spur of competition: for the variety obtainable from several masters as opposed to one: for the excitement of examination and the satisfaction of prizes. So far, so good. And Miles was careful to say nothing to discourage, and nothing to expose his understanding.

What he also realised was that Hugh, as yet, had no sense of, or desire to share in, the corporate life; no comprehension of the pride of loyalty to house and school; no understanding of responsibility or leadership.

Time was passing: another year and the school gates would be closed. Already it was a little late. Yet the whole matter was not one which could legitimately be hurried.

'I wish I could accomplish it in a matter of months,' he thought. He did not want to lose so promising a pupil, but he saw clearly the benefits which were awaiting Hugh were he sent to school. Miles was not conscious of any deliberate unselfishness: it merely occurred to him, in a spirit compounded of an odd mixture of ardour and detachment, to do the best he could with such material as came into his hands.

His respect for the communal life of schools was extreme. His own experience had been happy and strenuous: and at the University he had been equally fortunate. Hard work, hard exercise, and some attention to discipline had filled his

days. But, in spite of this conventional programme, he was not unimaginative nor entirely unoriginal. Very soon he had discovered that he wanted to teach. His father, who was a country clergyman with too large a family to take any of them very seriously, recommended private pupils as a beginning.

"If you can stand that you can stand anything," he had said. "It will mean that you are really qualified to teach. School's a different affair altogether: you have authority behind you. As a private tutor you'll have to rely on yourself, and if you can control one small boy you can manage a class-room. Go to it."

Miles had taken his advice. The term set, as a reasonable test, was three years, and he was already at the end of the second. When the full period was reached it was understood that he should return to his old school as an assistant master. And sometimes he already saw himself teaching a rapt Sixth Form. But more often the Lower Fourth were banging their desk-lids and laughing at him.

'Meanwhile, Hugh,' thought Miles, as he walked over the muddy common alone—"he's my present concern. He's an odd little beggar, but then, the whole family's odd." Striding along, with his chin in the air and the sunshine full on his glasses, he did not notice Rosita, hatless and in a white mackintosh, until he was almost upon her.

"Isn't it delicious after the rain?" she said. "Don't you love this country? What have you got in the North to compare with it?"

"Hills," he told her, "and lakes, and a great deal more grandeur. You're too soft here: we're hardier." Then he blushed tremendously, remembering that it was Rosita and not one of the children to whom he was talking. "I—I mean the climate, you know."

"Do you?" she said thoughtfully. "I wonder. Because I've a notion that before you remembered to be polite you

were being truthful. You Northerners are alarming, but you're honest men."

"Thank you," he said, quite solemnly, and wondered how any middle-aged woman capable of making such a sensible speech—too flattering, of course, but still very sensible—could be so flighty as not to wear a hat. It did not occur to him that Rosita was pretty and he would have been amazed to hear that she felt young. Being twenty-three himself and country-bred, a woman who had passed her fortieth year was an object for veneration if possible, and contempt if not. Something between the two formed his feeling for Mrs. Daleham. She was kind, obviously an excellent wife and an indulgent stepmother, but she skipped about too much, laughed too often, and was not always, Miles hated to admit it, in quite good taste. She made fun of a great deal that was not really laughable, criticised her neighbours and then, penitently, ridiculed herself. Now was that poise? Was it wisdom? Was it really *mature*?

"Benedict," Rosita was saying calmly, "has run away from Oxford and gone to London. Isn't it a bore? My husband's so annoyed. However, the boy is really very sensible. He walked into the offices of a rather unsuccessful highbrow paper and offered them articles on Chile and Peking. They were taken and, what's more, paid for. He says the paper will probably live three months: meanwhile he can support himself, and would Father send him twenty pounds?" Rosita interrupted herself to laugh heartily. "Godfrey's first impulse was to refuse. Then he saw the humour of it, and sent twenty-five."

"I don't see why," observed Miles.

"Oh, nor did he," explained Rosita. "Only it's all so ridiculous, you know, and obviously the boy can write. Of course, it's fearfully annoying, and naturally the University fees have got to be paid, but it's no manner of use telling Benedict he has got to go back. He would merely refuse."

Miles stared at her. "Refuse? But he's not of age. I mean, his father could insist."

"Godfrey's not very good at insisting, I'm afraid."

"Of course they are all *appallingly* spoilt."

"I suppose so. I envy them. It must be *so* enjoyable."

The young man looked shocked. "But not good for their characters."

Rosita's charming eyebrows were more arched than ever. "I wonder. I was never spoilt and I am sure I am a very weak character."

Miles, who was privately of her opinion, decided not to contradict her: his extreme honesty was often inconvenient. "Well," he said, "*we* were all brought up firmly, very firmly indeed, and I can't say that I think it was a mistake."

Rosita looked admiringly at his young, aggressive chin. "How many of you were there?"

"Seven."

"And are they all serious-minded?"

Miles grew warm. "My sisters," he retorted, "are not posturing little monkeys, anyhow."

"Meaning," said Mrs. Daleham sweetly, "Marina?"

His scowl deepened. "Well," he said, conscious that his comment was hardly in the best of taste, "you must admit that she is fantastically self-conscious."

"Is she? No more, I think, than most girls of her age. It is perhaps a trifle more noticeable because she has lived all her life out of England, and has picked up unusual little mannerisms and quaint tricks of speech."

"Quaint?" repeated Miles, as though it hurt him.

"Surely," said Rosita, "she is very attractive?"

"Yes," he said angrily. "She is. And she knows it. In my opinion it is a great pity, at her age, that Marina should be so attractive. All this bosh about going on the stage! This trotting round after that fat mountebank Wynnington Temple!"

"You dislike him?"

"He wants," declared Miles decisively, "a damned good kick in the pants."

"Hurrray!" cried Rosita.

He looked at her with deep reproach. What did she mean by hurrraying? How exaggerated she was! And why had she dragged Marina into the conversation? He didn't want to think about Marina. When he had been staying in the house he had hardly known how to avoid her bright, mocking eyes, or escape her derisive smile and cheeky tongue. He had been silent, aloof and as grand as possible, addressing almost all his conversation, which was not much, to Mr. Daleham as they sat at the breakfast table.

He was certain that he disapproved of Marina: she was such a little fashion-plate! And yet that hardly described her. If he hadn't fought shy of it, 'exotic' might have been the word. But he refused to apply anything so ridiculous. If only she would wear a dark blue gym suit and play netball like his sisters! If only she hadn't such thick dark curls, such dimples, such an unforgivably enticing smile!

"You find Hugh intelligent?"

He almost jumped: he had forgotten Rosita. "Yes," he said slowly, "I do. He's an extremely able little fellow."

"How I agree with you," said a voice behind them, and Hugh slipped between the pair.

"I was about to add," said Miles severely, "that one has, of course, to take into account the desultory character of your previous education and make full allowance for it."

"Most magnanimous of you," said the small boy. He was hatless, and attired in a mackintosh considerably too large for him, from the side pocket of which protruded a book.

"What on earth have you got there?" demanded Miles, and whisked it out before Hugh could protest.

His pupil's sallow little face reddened. "I was actuated entirely by motives of curiosity," he said.

"I believe you," said Miles, with a smile, and handed the book back again.

"You're very mysterious," remarked Rosita. "May I be permitted to know what advanced piece of literature Hugh had got hold of, or am I too young to be told?"

"I'm afraid you are," said Hugh, with composure.

Miles held his tongue. If Hugh wanted to read that admirable, if solid, publication, *The Public Schools' Year-Book* it was nobody else's affair. But, while he kept his own counsel, he admired Rosita's tact in dropping the subject. He felt that it implied a complete confidence in himself and he was young enough to be deeply gratified.

The three strolled towards the house in perfect amity. And Marina, watching them from the loggia, was pricked by an overwhelming desire to shatter their obvious content. It was too bad to see Hugh so seemingly serene, to observe Rosita smiling, to watch that abominable tutor thrust out that chin of his with increased aggressiveness.

"You are all looking very self-righteous," she announced. "Have you been for a long, hearty walk? In this country people always shine with virtue if they have walked a few miles in the rain. I often wonder whom they suppose they are benefiting."

"I think Mr. Rodwell is the only one of us who has been any distance," said Rosita good-humouredly. "I have only been to the village, and Hugh, judging by the immaculate state of his shoes, has travelled no further."

"So I alone come in for your jibe," said Miles, with his most supercilious smile. "I should be sorry to generalise, but I imagine that most men would agree with me when I say that on occasion one walks far and fast to escape company." With which he took himself off.

"First blood to him," observed Hugh.

Marina for once said nothing: she was too unhappy to know what to do with herself. The dull Sunday dragged on:

it had been too wet for the long walk to church, and the day seemed to be composed of nothing but yawns and newspapers. She longed for the morning which might bring a letter from Mr. Temple. He had been gone a fortnight and had not yet written to her. His rehearsals were not to begin until next month, but Mrs. Temple had said he was gone to London to visit the London Library and the British Museum on behalf of his book of reminiscences.

Marina's cheeks still burned as she remembered Godfrey's amusement at the actor's new venture. That was her father all over! He was pedantic and unfair. She was certain the book would be a splendid success; everything that Mr. Temple did was brilliant.

Left alone on the loggia, she leaned against the damp wood and remembered how he had looked as he took her in his arms and kissed her. She might have been his leading lady; it was as convincing as all that!

She closed her eyes and was miserable and happy together: but when she opened her eyes again she was only miserable.

What was the good of it all? And what could be done about the odd sinking feeling that meant she was really a little ashamed?

She felt very much alone, but in spite of that she had not got the stimulus of independence. She was subject to home discipline, she had background, she was conscious all the while of unsympathetic people about her.

The boys were engrossed in their own affairs, her father and stepmother had each other, Mr. Rodwell despised her. She was quite sure he despised her. He looked over her head and refused to laugh at her jokes. Also he very pointedly avoided speaking to her. Of course he was insufferable and hopelessly conceited, but he did talk rather well. There were times when, against her will, she listened while he and her father discussed eighteenth-century painting or modern French literature, and she noticed that

the young man had always something coherent, and sometimes original, to say.

She wondered if he were equally clear-sighted about people: if he understood the waywardness of the human heart as easily as he comprehended books and pictures.

‘Oh,’ thought Marina, beating her small fist against a rain-streaked pillar, ‘I wish time would pass quickly . . . I can’t *bear* this slice of it . . . I shan’t get a letter to-morrow, I know I shan’t . . . And everybody will go on being ordinary, and I shall have to go to those intolerable classes, and next Sunday will be as bad as this Sunday . . .’

“Miss Daleham.”

She jumped and looked over her shoulder, the tears still wet on her cheeks.

Miles Rodwell was standing in the doorway, polishing his spectacles on a large clean handkerchief.

“I owe you an apology,” he said, not looking at her, and breathing heavily on the lenses before he fell to rubbing them again. “I was unpardonably rude.”

“That’s all right,” she said quickly, “I asked for it.”

“That doesn’t excuse me.” He joined her by the balustrade and, putting on his glasses, gazed at the wild wet trees and the darkened lawn. “Just now,” he said, “before I spoke to you, you looked very distressed. I’m doubly sorry if in any way I was responsible.”

“Well,” said Marina frankly, “you were a bit, because I don’t like being hated. But, apart from that, you didn’t actually make a lot of difference.”

He said nothing for a moment, and she had an idea that she had hurt his feelings. Then he went on, coldly: “No one hates you. The idea’s grotesque. The mere fact that we’re inclined to annoy each other surely needn’t make you fly to extremes.”

“No,” said Marina meekly. “Only when you’re wildly unhappy you do tend to feel the whole world’s against you, don’t you?”

"I don't know," he replied, with a little smile. "I have never been 'wildly unhappy'."

"*What?*" exclaimed Marina. "Do you mean to say you have never been in love?"

At once his superciliousness returned to him: the kindness died out of his face. "I'm afraid I don't see the connection."

"But love is frightfully sad!" she assured him. She leant her curly head against the pillar and added: "It's simply *hell*."

"Indeed?" said Miles.

She felt dissatisfied and at the same time important. "One can't, of course, expect one's family to understand."

"There is always the possibility that one's family understand too well," he retorted. "It's a truism, surely, that to oneself and to the—the object of one's affections, as they say in novels, one is an extremely interesting person. But in one's own domestic circle one is simply the possibly annoying, and certainly unexceptional, creature who is usually late for breakfast, irresponsible in argument, and irrational in behaviour."

"I daresay," said Marina, beginning to feel impatient, "but families are not the best judges. Take my father as an example: I want to be an actress and I know I should be a good one. Yet he wants to turn me into a housemaid."

"I'm not sure," said Miles, "that I don't prefer a good housemaid to any kind of actress. But why are you so certain that you'd make a success of the stage?"

"Well, I've always taken a tremendous interest in it, and I've been told I recite awfully well, and—and a friend of mine says that with proper training I'd easily get engagements." This last statement was not strictly accurate, but Marina felt that, in order to convince her listener, she was entitled to a little latitude.

"*What* friend?" enquired Miles, very coolly indeed.

She had supposed that he knew. But if he didn't she was

delighted to be able to impress him. "Mr. Wynnington Temple."

"Well, he's a back number if ever there was one."

"He isn't!" exclaimed Marina indignantly. "Why, his name has only got to appear on the bill for everyone to flock to see the play. He's the biggest box-office draw in London."

"Was. Once. And even then only among a small section of the public. He gave a thrill to the stalls and the boxes, because he used to look like the popular conception of the suave and subtle diplomatist, and act in plays in which that unreal character was persuaded to leave State papers lying about on the drawing-room sofa. In real life, unfortunately, members of the Diplomatic Service all too often resemble pork butchers or undertakers. But Wynnington Temple, in his hey-day, created an amiable illusion. He's ceased even to do that now. His old admirers still go to see him, of course. But, if you happen to observe the house next time you go to a piece in which he's got the lead, I doubt if you'll find anyone there—with the exception of yourself—who is under forty. Wynnington Temple's a fake."

"He isn't!" stormed Marina. "You've no business to say such a thing. It's completely untrue. He . . . I . . . You don't know what you're talking about."

"I do know. And I repeat, he's a humbug. The man's not real at all. He's as false as the plays he acts in. Honesty," Miles was kind enough to allow, "honesty is coming into the theatre. Plays are beginning to have some approximation to real life. Ideas are rearing their heads, and problems are being openly discussed. But you never find Temple in that kind of play. He wouldn't know what to do with an argument, and his fine voice would crack if you gave him philosophy instead of high falutin' romantic speeches. Wynnington Temple's a joke nowadays."

She looked down at her hands as they trembled against

the balustrade. If it were true, and he less grand and distinguished than she supposed, then might not he love her, anyhow just a little? Nothing could change her opinion of him, whatever other people thought.

Her mood shifted again. Even if Miles were right, how could it benefit her? She had the wit to know that Wynnington Temple's estimate of himself remained unchanged.

"Marinal" exclaimed Miles, "for heaven's sake don't tell me you care for that obese bag of sawdust?"

"Oh!" she cried, rushing away from him, "you're impossible—I was a fool to try and talk to you!"

Neither of them noticed that he had used her name, had forgotten to be intelligent and calm, had indeed thought of nothing but a desire to impress upon her the unwisdom of deliberately courting trouble.

"As though," muttered Miles furiously, "it doesn't come sufficiently often without the invitation."

II

"It's beautiful," said Cherry Greenway authoritatively.

She stood behind Aldous' camp-stool, looking over his shoulder at the sketch on the easel, and greatly embarrassing the artist. "And that," she continued, "makes it all the more wanton."

Aldous, very red in the face, made no reply. Dan Greenway had given him the afternoon off, and he had decided to spend it painting the lovely bare trees in the little coppice at the end of the Greenways' orchard.

It was a golden November day, and the thin, shivering trees, the clear sky, the pure tonic quality of the air, delighted him.

But Cherry was a complication. This niece of Dan's

made Aldous nervous and tongue-tied. She was a thin, restless seventeen-year-old, with an alarming pair of critical blue eyes and a great deal of woolly, fair hair. She had small, sharp features and a small, sharp voice.

'She's like a needle,' thought Aldous, and he was afraid of her prick.

"When you can paint like this," she went on, "so effortlessly, how can you *bear* to get up at six o'clock in the morning and fuss over those wretched hens? People with half your talent think it worth while to devote their whole lives to it. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about."

The startled Aldous did believe her. Her father had taught her to distinguish between the good and the mediocre, and she had visited—so it seemed to him—every picture gallery in Europe. She talked so easily about the places she had seen, and was always so impatient with him when he had little to say about his own travels!

"You should ask my brother," he told her. "Benedict is more observant than I am."

"It would," she retorted, "be almost impossible to be less observant. And yet—yet your painting's so subtle, so unemphatic! Oh, bother! Now I'm talking like a half-baked critic. But you're exasperating, Aldous, you really are."

He supposed that her vexation with him was best explained by the fact that she herself yearned to paint and possessed no talent. She had inherited everything from her gifted father except the one thing essential—the power of expression. It was fortunate that she recognised it. She had been taught only to admire the sound craftsman, only to respect the heavy burden of genuine talent.

If Aldous had been merely an amiable amateur she would have taken no interest in him. She was extraordinarily detached and self-reliant for her age. But at once she recognised his gifts and, without the faintest hesitation, took upon

herself the responsibility of pointing out to him the error of his ways.

As a young man he was nothing to her: she was not sorry for his lame leg, nor won by his diffident manner, nor attracted by his frank good-natured face. She saw only the artist—who was deliberately hiding his light under a bushel. And the crime seemed to her unforgivable.

"My father," she said, "ran away from home at seventeen because he hated farming and wanted to paint. He went to Paris and worked in an art dealer's shop until he'd earned enough money to pay for his classes. Pretty soon he began to make a name for himself and then—like a fool—he married a model, and the rest of his life was just a fight against poverty. He was well known, of course, and the critics sang his praises, but he'd no chance with a sick wife—my mother had T.B.—and a couple of children, all hanging round his neck. We had to travel South for my mother's health. In the end she outlived him by a year. My young brother died, of the same complaint, six months later. I'm the only one left: I've no disease and no talent. My brother had both."

Aldous listened to her in perplexity. He had never before met any girl seemingly so callous and so obviously courageous. "You've had a frightfully hard time of it," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so. It's never easy to live in the same house with a great artist. My father was no exception to the rule. When I look at Uncle Dan and think that those two were brothers I can hardly believe it."

Aldous glanced at her. He disliked her tone. It sounded as if she held her uncle in contempt. "I think," he said stiffly, "that Mr. Greenway is very much to be respected."

"Don't be idiotic," said Cherry.

"I mean it," he retorted, "and—and you've no business to despise him."

"I despise everyone," she declared, "who makes no effort

to get away from the humdrum and the ordinary. Aunt Dorcas' mind is in the pantry and Uncle Dan's is in the hen-roost."

Aldous was very red. "You—you're their guest," he stammered.

"That's my misfortune, not my fault. But I don't bother them very often. And," she added, with her sharp little chin raised, "I'm not dependent on them. Ever since I've left school I've kept myself." And she sighed. "Nothing much of a job, but mine own."

"I think that's jolly good," he assured her. "I wish I could say the same."

"*You?*" she returned. "It's different for you: you're an artist. If I had your talent do you suppose I'd be tapping a typewriter all day?"

"D'you like your work?" he asked, anxious to direct her attention from himself.

Her smile struck him as oddly bitter. "It's all right," she said. "I work for a woman novelist. On her good days she's almost affable, and on her bad days she raises hell. But she writes sound stuff and she goes all out to do it. The whole house has to serve her—her husband, her children, her maids, and your humble servant her secretary. I think she's right. Art comes before everything."

"Bosh," said Aldous, wiping his brushes. "Civility's more important. There's too much excuse made for the artistic temperament."

She stared at his canvas, propped up on the easel. "You can turn out good work like that and yet talk blasphemy!" she remarked. "Listen a minute. As I told you, my father ran away, changed his name, changed his nationality as near as made no odds, and settled down in France to paint. When he died he left two young children and a sick wife, a burden of debts, and a collection of unsaleable pictures. They were unsaleable because he was in the forefront of a movement

which later—and too late for him—became fashionable. The fruits of his earlier work had been translated into schooling for me and sanatoriums for my brother, and visits to the South for Mother. After his death people began to make enquiries about him. One or two Americans wanted to buy his pictures. But it was the dealers who made the money, the dealers who had haggled and bargained pitilessly enough when Father was unknown.” She paused and looked from the sketch to Aldous’ disturbed face. “Do you still say he was wrong to sacrifice so much for his art? I admit we were all part of the sacrifice, although he was at such pains to pay doctors’ bills and school fees. Living with him was like living under Etna: you had to be prepared at all times for preparatory cracks and rumbles, and then—if you wanted to preserve a whole skin—you had to fly.” She laughed suddenly. “He was preposterous, with his beard and his velvet coat and his ridiculous explosions of temper, but no one ever had a more interesting father.”

Aldous gave it up: she was too much for him. “Well,” he said lamely, “I admire your loyalty awfully.”

“Loyalty?” Her direct eyes, with their childishly hard challenge, abashed him. “Not to the man, to the artist! That was what he taught. It was his creed, his mission, call it what you like. He wanted me to recognise genius if I met it, and to put first-class work before everything. ‘Nothing else matters,’ he said. ‘A man’s morals, his manners, his mode of expressing himself, none of them count. It’s the work that matters, the soul in the strip of canvas.’ ”

Aldous wanted to say “Bunk,” but after all the chap was dead. Perhaps he drank. The girl seemed to admit that he had knocked them all about.

“Well,” he said, “I don’t think I quite understand all that. But then, painting’s just a hobby with me.”

Cherry stopped short: she was pale and her eyes shone

with anger. "You booby!" she exclaimed. "What the heck do you suppose I've been wasting my breath on you for? Don't you know I've been trying to din into your thick head that you've a gift from heaven right under your hand, and you're doing your best to kill it."

Aldous got up and began to fold up the easel. He did not enjoy being told that he was a booby, or that he had a thick head. In fact he disliked Dan's niece a good deal.

"I'm afraid I must go indoors now," he said. "It's time to feed the hens."

"*Hens?*" repeated Cherry, with utter disdain, and so far forgot herself as to imitate a cock, loudly and with considerable skill. "There, that's music in your ear, I suppose."

Aldous said nothing. He continued to pack up his things, and limped away.

Cherry stood rigid, looking after him. Her thin little face was stony. And Miss Greenway, coming to search for her a quarter of an hour after, found her still there, still looking.

"My dear," said Dorcas, "it's tea-time."

"I don't want any." She turned her accusing eyes on her aunt. "You're all banded together, you're agreed. You think Father was wrong."

"You come along indoors and taste my new scones," advised the other. "There's a pot of blackberry jam I've been keeping for you." She patted her niece's shoulder. "Too much talking," she added, "leads nowhere. Your father and I often went blackberrying together when we were children. We were happy enough then. It's my belief that it's better to dwell on the cheerful memories. He could fill a basket quicker than any of the other boys, and yet I believe he'd still time to eat more than all the rest put together. I can see his stained fingers now, and the smudges they made on his face."

Cherry flung an arm round her waist. "Aunt Dorcas, there are times when I love you."

"I was always one," said the little lady calmly, "for making the most of small mercies. Now, dear, come along, and try to behave prettily before young Mr. Daleham. Remember, he has a lame leg."

"What's a lame leg compared with a talent like his?"

"Maybe they're both misfortunes," returned her aunt.

"I THINK he would regard it as a friendly gesture," said Rosita.

Godfrey made a face. "I daresay, but he doesn't deserve it, you know. This running away from Oxford's no joke. It's placed me in an extremely awkward position. The authorities will assume that I can't manage my own son."

"They're so used to other people's sons," interrupted his wife soothingly.

"Other people's children are more tractable than mine," he grumbled. "It's all very well to make light of the whole business, but I think Benedict should be made to see the error of his ways. He has wasted my money, and otherwise behaved abominably."

"Dearest, he *is* trying to earn his own living. I am sure that the only reason that he doesn't write is because he wants to wait until he has some genuinely good news to send you. Meanwhile, *please* let me go to London and assure myself that he's well and happy."

"I repeat," said Godfrey, "he doesn't deserve it. Of course, Zita, you can go if you want to. If you think it necessary."

She did. It seemed an irresistible opportunity to exercise tact, offer advice and bring father and son together. A thoroughly enjoyable rôle. Delighted, she kissed Godfrey.

"Thank you, darling. I'll take the ten-thirty from

Redbury to-morrow morning. Benedict shall lunch with me and tell me all his news; it will be the greatest possible fun."

"Will it?" said Godfrey. He dropped his hands on her shoulders. "Look here," he said, "don't you go taking his part against me."

"My dear!" She smiled. "Is it likely?"

"No, but it's possible. Don't kow-tow, Zita. Be firm."

Kow-tow? She was going to be tactful. Surely Godfrey understood that?

"This business of Aldous was the start of it," her husband was saying, "and then the others followed his example. They're restive, undisciplined. Giving them a mother hasn't made the difference which, I confess, I expected. Not," he added hastily, "that there is the slightest reflection on you, dearest. All I mean is . . ."

"Quite," said Rosita. She disliked saying 'quite', but she disliked still more to hear Godfrey floundering.

He still gripped her shoulders, looking at her in confusion and distress. "You mustn't think," he began, "that it's anything to do with you, or that you're not a success with them. Why they happen to have chosen this particular time to assert themselves I can't even begin to guess, but for heaven's sake don't blame yourself."

For a moment she was silent with surprise: it had never occurred to her to blame herself. Was she responsible for Henrietta's children? Then she pulled herself together. It was hardly generous to think of Marina and her brothers under such a heading. They were Godfrey's children. And, in helping them, she would, of course, be helping him. Meanwhile his fingers were gripping just a little too hard. He was bewildered, poor Godfrey; so much at sea indeed that at one moment he was imploring her not to regard the children as more important than himself, and at the next declaring that she was not to blame herself for Aldous' and Benedict's shortcomings.

"Dearest," she said, moving her shoulders just sufficiently to ease that kind but slightly unfortunate pressure, "dearest, I can't have you worried like this. You must reserve all your energies for your book."

"Yes, but you know this sort of thing interferes with my book." Was it conceivable that Godfrey could be pettish? "It's impossible to avoid feeling anxious, as well as annoyed. Marina, by the way, strikes me as being very unsettled. Her manner to young Rodwell, for example, is amusing in its way, but I'm pretty certain it exasperates him. And then to us, to you and me, she seems extremely uncommunicative."

"It will pass," said Rosita happily, "I am sure it will pass. She feels a little resentment at not being allowed to go to London, you know. I think she saw herself training for the stage, and becoming Wynnington Temple's leading lady in something under six months."

"I doubt it," interrupted Godfrey. "Marina's a minx, but she's not a fool. No, Rosita, give her her due, she was prepared to have quite a hard time of it."

His wife paused. So it did not do even mildly to criticise one of the children? Undoubtedly these Dalehams clung together! She felt chilled and said, a little sharply: "I don't doubt Marina's gifts, for a moment, but I think her affection for Mr. Temple has rather blinded her to the hazards of the professional stage."

"Oh, as to that," said Godfrey easily, "all young girls fall in love with actors, or writers, or musicians, old enough to be their grandfathers. I don't attach any importance to it."

"Well, I hope you're right."

"We've not been in England a year," he continued, "and the first young man who kisses her will make short work of her interest in Wynnington Temple."

"Unless his kisses compare indifferently with those of Mr. Temple."

Godfrey stared. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I think it highly unlikely that the fellow's attempted anything of the sort."

"Do you, dear?"

"Don't you?"

"Not at all. Marina's extremely kissable, and Mr. Temple, from all I hear, is not the man to neglect his opportunities."

"It never occurred to me." Godfrey looked dismayed. "I'm astounded. I should have said that a man in his position would have found an ardent child a trifle irritating. Dear me, how extremely awkward, if you're right. Near neighbours, and so on. Besides, little Mrs. Temple is really quite an agreeable creature, even if she *was* once somebody's cook."

"I heard, a barmaid."

"Possibly. Anyhow, it was an eminently respectable calling. No, no, Zita, we can't have Temple kissing Marina. I wonder if, after all, I ought to have let her go to London?"

"They'd have met for a certainty. He's more often there than here. No, Godfrey, I am sure she is better at home. I feel confident her attention will soon be distracted."

"I said that just now, dear, and you seemed to doubt me."

"No," explained Rosita, "I only wanted to draw your attention to the fact that when the desired young man turns up, he will have to possess enough character to displace quite a formidable adversary. But I think he will do it. I feel sure he will."

"Then the sooner he makes his appearance the better."

Rosita smiled. Should she or shouldn't she? Perhaps not yet. But there was no harm in dropping a gentle hint. Godfrey was not very likely to take it. In common with many highly intelligent men he was often a little obtuse.

It was quite convenient in its way.

"What a sound young man Miles Rodwell is," she said. "Really, I quite look forward to luncheon when you

and he are talking together. Hugh couldn't have a better tutor."

"I wish," said Godfrey rather bitterly, "Aldous and Benedict had half his sense. He takes a most balanced view of things."

Rosita smiled at him tenderly. It was nice to discover that Godfrey had a weak spot or two. Undoubtedly the tutor had also discovered his employer's Achilles' heel. Or was it possible that Miles really held those solid, those indubitably old-fashioned views which Godfrey trotted out with so much frank satisfaction?

Rosita thought the matter over, and came to the conclusion that the young man very likely *did* share Godfrey's opinions, and, if so, that it was all to his credit.

"I'm so glad you like him," she said. "I too think he is a most agreeable young man." It would not do, she decided, at this moment to add that she personally considered that he lacked the charm of Benedict, and the attractive humility of Aldous. She was sure he was admirable, and that was all that mattered. And if, in later life, he became a trifle dull, even the typical schoolmaster, by that time Marina too would have settled down—but what was she saying? She was going far too quickly. Really, it was necessary that she should keep her mind on the subject immediately requiring her attention. And that subject was Benedict.

On the following morning, therefore, she boarded the village bus for Redbury. The day was damp and misty: her feet were cold, and she could not help reflecting how very much more comfortable it would have been to have remained at home by the fire.

There were few people in the bus, and none whom she knew, so that she had the dubious advantage of keeping her somewhat scattered thoughts to herself. Soon she would have to be looking out for new maids to take the place of Walker and Cook. It was not an enjoyable pastime, and

the idea of sitting in her drawing-room, placating taciturn young women with hopeful smiles, occurred to her as being a nuisance. "It is an easy place," she would say; "there are plenty of outings," and then they would look round the walls, and edge towards the door, telling her they would think it over.

That is what used to happen to her in London when she was housekeeping for her father. She never knew why. She was always kind and helpful, she never failed to smile, she dismissed the work airily as "the usual duties", and stressed the advantages, with particular emphasis on the benefits of a room of one's own.

Yet so often they said, for frequently they came—and went—in pairs, that it wasn't the work they were afraid of, but sharing a room was more company and what they were used to, and—well, they'd let her know. Again and again Rosita had accompanied them to the front door herself, still determinedly smiling, and trying to persuade herself that they did mean to come. But when the all too frequent postcard arrived next morning, saying that they had been suited elsewhere, she remembered that the cook had looked distinctly flighty, and that the parlour-maid had not had truthful eyes.

It would have been nice, of course, if marriage had put an end to all that, only unfortunately even love required that the fish should be fried, and the spoons polished.

'I must be strong-minded,' Rosita told herself, stamping her thin little feet. 'I must be calm and sensible. And anyhow I've got a fortnight before the others go. I needn't get rattled. I hope, at least, that the next ones will be dog-lovers. They'll need to be in our house.' And she thought of Punchinello a little sternly, for he had abandoned his basket in the passage for a corner of his master and mistress's bedroom, and Rosita thought the exchange a mistake.

But Godfrey, who was, she had to admit, a little un-

balanced about Punch, had worn a slight air of grievance during the spaniel's banishment, and Rosita had found that harder to bear than the trifling discomforts, during the night watches, of a creaking basket and the comfortable grunts of a scratching dog, or the sound of paws scrabbling on the counterpane and Godfrey's sibilant whisper: "Get *down*, Punch, get *down*!"

'It's so silly to let little things annoy one,' she mused, and was immediately conscious of being ridiculous. Was it not always the little thing which vexed? It was far easier to endure major burdens which provoked sympathy and assistance.

And she fell at once to thinking of her stepchildren. So contented was she in considering their interesting shortcomings that she nearly failed to get out of the bus at Redbury Town Hall. Here she gathered her wits about her and made her way to the station, fishing in her bag for the money for her ticket. She often wished that she could emulate those assured people who stood unflustered before booking offices, were never conversational, and only produced the money at the last moment, almost as though it were an afterthought, and certainly with condescension.

She had never been able to achieve anything like that herself. Aware that her feet were colder than ever, that her hat felt perched, and that the bus ride had encouraged an unnecessary tendency to yawn, she entered the station and faced the booking-office clerk. For Godfrey's sake she was going to be economical: she almost wished that the clerk knew about Godfrey and his family: it would make him understand why it was impossible, or at any rate undesirable, for her to travel first-class.

Clutching the silver in her hand, she said: "One third return Waterloo—er—cheap day ticket. I'm coming back this evening."

"Cheap day's Wednesday," said the clerk coldly. He

stood, not in front of the aperture but to the side, as though Rosita did not matter in the very least.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in dismay. "I thought the book said Friday."

Silence.

"Then," murmured Rosita feebly, "I'll just have a third return Waterloo."

A hard little piece of green cardboard was flipped towards her. She had to grope in her bag for more money to pay for it. Another passenger had arrived and was waiting restlessly behind her. The clerk was drumming his fingers impatiently. A train rushed into the station, and Rosita wasted precious seconds craning to look beyond the ticket collector towards the platform.

"That isn't mine, that isn't the London train, is it?" she demanded plaintively.

The clerk caught up her money and planked down the change. "No," he snapped.

She put her ticket in her mouth and hurried away. The ticket collector jerked his thumb behind him. "Other side," he said. "Over the bridge."

"Oh *dear*," sighed Rosita, flying down an odoriferous passage, and across a lumpy slope, and up a great many steps with highly unpleasant gaps between them. Another train rushed in on her side of the platform. Rosita began to run, and arrived panting, as the guard was about to blow his whistle.

"Waterloo?"

Without replying he delivered a short, shrill blast, waved his flag, folded it up under his arm, and finally said, as he swung away: "Next but one."

There was no one on the platform: the bookstall was dull and watched over by a very sharp-eyed little boy. She walked up and down, past the advertisements for happy holidays and foreign travel, past the 'Ladies', the 'Gentle-

men' and the door marked 'Private', but still her feet remained cold, her hat perched, her self-esteem nowhere. Once more a train snorted and hurried in. She thought she would ask, to make sure: "Waterloo?"

The porter addressed yanked some milk-cans within a few inches of her toes. The noise was disastrous to conversation. Nevertheless, she tried again. And then she saw that he was annoyed. He stared at her angrily and yelled: "No!"

She moved off at once. Doubtless she had made him repeat himself, but why should he mind? What a detestable morning! It was ridiculous the way people expected so much of one. After all, she could do things they couldn't. Quite a number of things. And, in her time, several persons had thought extremely well of her. There was that dance, for example, not more than fifteen years ago, when that very good-looking Major of Marines had said she was adorable: and there was that really quite important Greek scholar who had declared, that same summer, that she had a figure worthy of Diana: and there was that occasion at Henley Regatta when a highly distinguished rowing-blue had compared her to a nymph.

Fifteen years ago or not, it was highly satisfactory to remember these genial comments. Of recent years the tributes which had come her way had been a trifle more prosaic, except, of course, for dear Godfrey. He—bless him!—said the nicest things, even if he did not indulge in hyperbole nor compare her to nymphs and goddesses. "Certainly I have been, and still am, appreciated," decided Rosita angrily. "Waterloo train!"

'Patronage and even scorn,' she went on, 'don't matter in the *least* . . .' In front of her was a row of stationary railway carriages. The doors were being slammed. "*London* . . ." she heard, and, wrenching herself from the warm, safe past, she entered the train with more precipitancy than grace.

The carriage was crowded and, taking the only vacant place, she observed upon the faces of her fellow-travellers that expression of extreme dissatisfaction characteristic of all passengers discovering that someone else is minded to make a journey with them.

Wedged, therefore, between a large, unaccommodating dowager in several tweed coats, and a small, corpulent man in a damp mackintosh, she crossed her knees, closed her eyes, and fell at last to thinking of Benedict. It was some time since they had had news of him. And it was easy to understand his reluctance to write. Naturally poor Benedict was tasting inevitable disillusionment, his confidence was being shaken, his youthful self-conceit was suffering shock.

Rosita felt very tenderly towards him. It was always easy to feel tender towards unfortunate youth. What was infinitely more difficult was to rejoice in the audacity of its success. But Benedict was not, of course, successful. Probably by now he was extremely hard up. And that again, in its way, was a pleasing thought. Not that she wanted him to be in the least unhappy: but she did want to be the means of cheering him up.

"Look, dear old man," she wanted to say to him, "I know you love poetry and hope to write it eventually. Your father and I entirely understand. But it's better, isn't it, to make it a side-line? You must have a real profession, you know. The Consular Service, perhaps. Your languages would be so useful. But first you must continue your education and take a degree. And all the time you can go on writing. Then, when you've really settled down to your job, you can spend all your leisure in cultivating a completely delightful hobby."

Surely that was reasonable? It was unprejudiced, too, because it was just the reverse advice to that which she had offered Aldous. The elder boy's hobby should undoubtedly become his profession: the younger, equally undoubtedly,

should be encouraged to regard his love of verse-making as a pleasant means of employing his leisure.

'Benedict is so attractive,' thought Rosita, for she had not seen her stepson for some time, and had quite forgotten that his attraction had sometimes worn thin. 'He is so attractive that I am confident I shall have no difficulty with him. He will probably be proud, and a little ashamed of his poverty. He will try to hide it from me. He will say he is writing articles for the Press, when he means that he is only getting editors' rejection slips. Poor darling, I must be very, very tactful.' Here, by accident, she pressed against the round gentleman's shoulder, and received an irate glance in return. Murmuring an apology, she edged away and became involved in the dowager's several coats. Again she apologised, while the august one pettishly tugged at the skirts on which poor Rosita was unconsciously sitting. The rest of the carriage watched. They enjoyed seeing that distressed pink flush spread over the culprit's charming face. It served her right: she was a fidget. Besides, she was pretty and had she not nudged Mackintosh? Dreadful in a grey-haired woman who was probably a grandmother!

'No,' thought Rosita, to whom these upsetting thoughts occurred, 'they could hardly suspect me of being a grandmother. "A woman with growing girls of her own." That's the phrase. I wonder if they really thought I nudged that dreadful little man on purpose? They *couldn't*.' All the same it was not a comfortable journey. She did not realise, she never *did* realise how few people are capable of concentration, how quickly impressions die and others come to take their place. Why, no sooner had the mild commotion she had caused faded away, than the passengers were looking out of the window at the nurserymen's advertisements and thinking of their gardens, and gazing at the new housing estates, and watching the tall chimneys of London's factories ever coming closer.

'I mustn't be surprised,' thought Rosita, when at last she had recovered sufficiently to turn her attention to Benedict again, 'if he looks thin and very shabby. And above everything else I must be most careful not to say "I told you so".'

She had sent Benedict a wire to warn him that she was arriving at Waterloo at midday, and since it was all too likely that the poor boy had nothing to do, she felt confident that he would meet her at the barrier.

But he was not at the gates when she reached them, and she was just about to walk away towards the exit, wondering whether she should drive to his rooms, or sit down on a bench to wait for him, when she suddenly caught sight of a hurrying figure coming towards her. It wore a neat brown suit, which she recognised as Benedict's best, and a hat that was unfamiliar.

"Rosita," he exclaimed, as he came up. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting? The fact is I'm incredibly busy and I had a horrible feeling I mightn't be able to get here at all. As it is, I've only got five minutes to spare. I've got a job on a paper, Rosita. Reporting for the *Daily Echo*. I'm due at a Mayfair wedding at two o'clock and I've got to interview an American actress before that. Incidentally, that story'll amuse you. I'll tell you about it presently. Meanwhile, how are you?"

She held his hand and looked at him. He was smiling, alert and affable.

"I do congratulate you," she said feebly. "Why didn't you let us know?"

"I assure you I haven't had time. The man who liked my articles on Peking gave me the introduction. He said the fellow who's the big noise behind the *Daily Echo* likes original young men. So off I went for my interview, explained that I'd walked out on Oxford, and said I wanted to write verse, but I'd no objection to being a journalist

first. The Big Noise laughed, said—with embellishments—that he liked my cheek, and put me on to this reporting business. Not so bad, Rosita, is it?”

“No *indeed*.” She hoped she sounded hearty. Benedict looked so uncommonly pleased with himself. Original young men indeed! And, unable to forbid the exercise of a little maternal severity, she said:

“Ought you to be wearing your best suit?”

“Weddings and American actresses, Rosita! When I do police-court stuff I’m less of the immaculate young man.”

“Police court?”

“Reporters can’t be choosers.”

“Nosing into other people’s affairs!” She was sorry the moment she had said it. ‘Nosing’ was not a happy phrase.

Benedict’s face showed it. “One learns,” he said stiffly, “the seamy side of human nature, of which, owing to my unnecessarily guarded youth, I was absurdly unfamiliar.”

“I see,” she said humbly. “And—and are you well paid?” This was not what she meant to ask at all. It was a direct question—quite devoid of tact.

“Not at all badly,” said Benedict. “A good deal better than I had dared to hope. What’s more, I’m meeting people. Newspaper-men, journalists who’ve already arrived, critics, novelists, the whole crowd. I’ve got plenty of friends.”

She watched his face as they stood there on the wide stretch of pavement beyond the arc line of platforms. And it suddenly occurred to her how young he was, how silly, happy, conceited and brave.

“Oh, my dear,” she said, and laid a hand on his sleeve, “I’m glad, I’m truly glad. But you’ll be careful, won’t you? We—we shan’t be able to help feeling anxious.”

“You needn’t,” he said, and the old lordly way reminded her of his manner at home. “I know how to avoid sharks and harpies. The job’s what I’m interested in. I don’t care a hoot how boring the routine is, following up crimes,

accidents, or film stars, so long as my work's satisfactory and gets noticed, and I have the opportunity to free-lance and strike out on my own a bit. Tell Father it's the greatest possible blessing, from my point of view, that we stayed in China and South America instead of coming home to be educated. It's a background for one's imaginative work, *and*," he broke off to laugh, "and for one's conversation, Rosita! I can dine out on Peking any night of the week. By the way, I'm changing my abode. I'm going to a sort of pension where several of our fellows live. It's in Bloomsbury." The naïve pride with which he made this remark caused Rosita a pang. She wondered if it were clean and what the 'other fellows' were like.

"What do you do with yourselves in the evenings?" she asked.

"Talk," replied Benedict promptly. "Unless, of course, there's any work on hand. We cram into one of the chaps' rooms, and smoke pipes, and drink beer, and discuss modern poetry and drama, and politics, of course; it's all wildly interesting."

"But," she protested, "you would have got all that at Oxford."

Benedict looked at her pityingly. "In an academic sort of way. But these fellows *are* poets and dramatists and politicians. I mean—I mean, Rosita, that they've all written stuff already, even if it hasn't been accepted. And some of them have made speeches in Hyde Park."

"You surprise me."

"Well," he defended, nettled at her tone, "that's more the real thing than the Union." He glanced at his watch, and added: "I must fly in a minute. I've got to be at the Ritz at a quarter to one precisely. I'm told the lady's punctual. That's to say she won't keep me waiting longer than half an hour."

"Who is she?" asked Rosita, and her eyebrows flew up

when Benedict, with a carelessness that was ludicrously overdone, revealed the name of a New York stage favourite. "My *dear*," she added, "aren't you excited?"

"Not particularly," he lied, "but, Rosita, the joke is, there's been no end of a song and dance about the comedy she's playing in. You see, Wynnington Temple was cast for the leading man, but she only knew him by reputation. When they met at the first rehearsal she decided then and there that he just wouldn't do. She said it was no earthly good treating a modern play, written in the staccato manner, as though it were Pinero. Temple, who, of course, thinks he knows everything, was blind with rage. He tried to make out she had still to learn her job. But luckily the producer knew a thing worth two of that. One gathers there was a first-class row. Anyhow, my lady said she wasn't going to have her style cramped by acting that would reduce all Broadway to shrieks of mirth, and nothing would persuade her to play opposite Mr. Wynnington Temple."

"Did they get rid of her?"

"On the contrary, they got rid of *him*. Her name on the bills is worth more than his. Of course, he's going about saying he threw up the part because the producer was a fool, and the little lady never-mind-what. But we've got most of the true story and I'm just off to get the remainder."

"Do you publish—regardless of Mr. Temple's feelings?"

"Oh, we're very tactful. We don't mention vulgar disputes. We merely give her full publicity and casually mention the new leading man. But I rather fancy this little episode is going to suggest to the theatre, as a whole, that our friend Temple is a little past it."

"Poor man."

Benedict shrugged his shoulders. "If he'd consent to play minor parts suited to his age—and bulk—he mightn't do so badly."

For a moment she felt angry: in the pride of his youth, his

slenderness, his happy poverty, he had no feeling for that tired, fat, rich, elderly man. It was cruel of Benedict, who had everything—and nothing—to be so easily contemptuous.

"What are you doing after the wedding?" she asked.

"I'm off to the East Coast. A girl's stabbed her sweetheart with a pair of scissors. We want the story."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh yes."

"Then she'll be in prison."

"There are her parents," said Benedict, "and there's the young woman the sweetheart was carrying on with. They'll all have something to say." His face appeared confident and serene. Rosita looked at it almost with horror.

"Benedict, Benedict!" she exclaimed.

His eyes were clear and amused. "Why, Rosita!" he said. "It's no use being squeamish, you know. Half a million readers will be eagerly lapping it up to-morrow. Look here, my time's nearly up. Which way are you going?"

"I don't know," she confessed. "I came to London to see you. I had hoped we'd lunch together."

"To see me?" He appeared surprised. "But surely you knew I'd be working?"

"No," retorted Rosita. "I'm afraid the idea didn't occur to me." For the life of her she couldn't help it. He was too cocksure altogether. "Well," she added, "I had better go and look at the new hats in Bond Street."

"I hope," he said politely, "you'll find one you like."

"Good gracious!" she returned. "I can't afford to buy one. I shall merely observe what's worn, and then go home and change the ribbon on my old blue felt, and wear it turned up in front instead of at the side." But he was not paying attention to her: he was not even interested enough to be annoyed at her earlier lapse from good humour. He was thinking of something else. It no longer mattered to him if his family made light of his achievements or questioned

his ability. In a few weeks he had grown up and acquired independence. Because he had earned some odd pounds and possessed a precarious job, he was indifferent to criticism and immune from sympathy.

"Shall you go by bus?" he said. "If so, we can travel part of the way together."

Rosita accepted meekly. She sat beside him on their journey and listened to his tale of London gossip. He might have lived in the capital all his life: he was familiar in his touch and sometimes droll. He told her stories of politicians, of editors, of Russian dancers. He seemed to have been everywhere and to have met any number of people.

She wondered if he were in love, but, when she asked him, he frowned and said that he was not.

"I thought perhaps," she said, with a kind of tentative malice, "it was essential to a poet."

"Not my kind of poetry," returned Benedict. "I write about politics."

That silenced her, and for the rest of the journey he did the talking. It did not occur to him to ask after his family, nor to enquire if his father was still vexed with him. Cheerfully and with complete aplomb, he spoke only of those events which held his own interest.

'Well,' thought Rosita, when he left the bus, 'I'm not sure that he won't be a great man after all. To be as self-centred as that is decidedly the first step towards genius.'

As for herself, she felt at a loose end. The rain had ceased by the time she reached Bond Street, but there were not many people about and the shop windows seemed to her idle fancy to lament the absence of spectators and to lack something of their customary appeal.

Rosita, looking at the baskets of flowers on the florist's shelves, thought, a little regretfully, that no one had ever thought her worth a whole basketful. Once, in a garden, a young man had given her a rose, and now and then, when

she had fallen ill, a few pink carnations—those impersonal flowers—had come her way.

‘But not *baskets*,’ thought Rosita, greedily, ‘nor orchids, nor gardenias. How ordinary I have always been!’ And she went on, feeling chastened. It was the knowledge that she could not be useful to Benedict which really depressed her: but because she felt small on his account all her inadequacies seemed to accumulate.

Three hats, three bewitching little hats, beyond a waste of glass, did nothing to lift her spirits. ‘What a guy I should look in them!’ she decided. ‘I have far too much hair and not enough of the fashionable manner. I should appear ridiculous, while other women merely look in the mode.’ Again she went on, feeling very much as she used to do in the days when her father had gazed at her through his monocle and sighed: when her brother had said that really it was time she learned to look like everyone else. By ‘everyone’, he meant, of course, the slavish and elegant minority. It was a pity, Rosita reflected sadly, that she had consistently disappointed them. The fact had power to depress her still, and, travelling a little mournfully, she had no idea what a fresh and charming air she lent to that winding and most sophisticated street.

But Wynnington Temple, strolling up the damp pavement, turned a practised eye upon her and reflected that here was a woman, no longer young, who yet retained something of youth’s attractive uncertainty. The young might appear calm and self-assured, but by a hundred gestures, a hundred eager confidences, betrayed their secret lack of self-reliance. And so it was, he judged, with this woman. He had only met her once or twice, at his own house, when she returned his wife’s call, and in the village post-office with her step-daughter Marina. The child, he decided with amusement, had appeared the more artificial of the two. Yet he knew how genuine she could be, how soft, vulnerable and

adoring! He had never written to her: he had been too busy. And his face fell as he thought of the play and the disgraceful scene at the first rehearsal, and how he had cut short the little American's outburst, and the producer's stammering excuses, with the curt information that he washed his hands of the whole affair, he threw up his part.

After that everybody was very quiet and polite, and enormously relieved. But he kept away from the whispers and the gossip. His agent was a little sulky, but the author of the play wrote him the nicest of letters. Wynnington Temple ignored the pair. He dined once at his club and was heard to say that the theatre was degenerating.

It was unlike him to be walking in Bond Street on a wet morning. It might almost have appeared as if he wished to avoid his friends, and guessed, rightly, that few of them would venture out and spoil their fine feathers.

All the same he was glad to see Mrs. Daleham: she did not belong to his world, and although she was a part of the public she was too insignificant to matter. Also she was a pretty woman, and it would do him good if he took her out to lunch. He might discuss Marina with her. The situation, in short, would not lack piquancy.

For her part Rosita was for bowing and passing on. She did not care for her little stepdaughter's friend, and had no wish to make his better acquaintance.

But Wynnington Temple had stopped squarely in her path. "How d'you do?" he said. "And what are you doing in London?"

"I came up to see Benedict," she told him, "my husband's second boy."

"The one that was fool enough to leave the Varsity?"

"He's found himself a job," she defended. "He's reporting for the *Daily Echo*. Considering the competition I think it's very clever of him."

"No accounting for taste. I suppose he's brilliant. All

the young men are brilliant nowadays—until it comes to staying the course. Then they crumple up and run home to their mammas.”

“I don’t agree with you at all.”

“Come and lunch with me, and we’ll discuss it.”

She was about to refuse, when she remembered what Benedict had told her. She glanced quickly at his face, and saw that it looked sagging and bitter. “Thank you,” she said. “I should like to very much.”

“Where would you like to go? Since you’re up from the country, I suppose you want to see all the notables.”

She shook her head. She never wanted to see notables, and it occurred to her that at the present time he would very likely be anxious to avoid them himself. “No,” she said, “I’m not dressed for the part. May we go somewhere quiet?”

“By all means.” He betrayed nothing, but she was sure he was relieved.

And, accompanying him down quiet and narrow streets, towards the discreet restaurant of his choosing, she noticed how heavy and inelastic his tread was, and how much older his manner seemed as compared with that which he revealed upon the stage. ‘It is impossible,’ she thought, ‘that Marina can really care for this man.’ And covertly she watched him, as they sat down before the round table in the sheltered corner to which the obsequious head waiter led them. The famous profile was still visible, thickened, blurred, but yet to be admired: the fine head, with its bushy grey hair, worn a little long, was certainly imposing: the heavy-lidded dark eyes, the beautiful hands, the self-conscious yet illuminating smile, were all significant. But what a bitter, tired and peevish face when caught off its guard! What weary lines scored it, what stains triviality, and sourness, and hard living had left upon it!

“Well,” he said, with an effort to seem genial, “how do you like being a stepmother?”

"Very well indeed."

"They're docile, are they?"

"Not at all. But they are most interesting."

"Your husband's too soft with them," said Wynnington Temple. "I always tell Marina that. Children are none the better for being indulged. I had a hard upbringing and it's done me no harm. I had to fight every inch of the way. Nobody ever helped me, I can assure you."

"I don't think," lied Rosita, "that our young people want helping particularly. They prefer to look after themselves. Up to a point anyhow." And she felt that she had been generous.

"Exactly. Up to a point. When their funds get low they descend on their families. That's not independence. When my funds got low I'd no one to turn to. I had to take what circumstance thrust in my way."

She saw that he was in the mood to talk of himself with sentimental fondness. It was a kind of self-justification, a retort to the present age for its refusal to accept him: a stressing of youth's failure to assess values.

At any other time Rosita might have contradicted him warmly. She knew that the modern girls and boys were as brave and adventurous as ever they had been, and as foolish too, which helped to make them likeable.

But to-day Wynnington Temple had to be accorded the indulgence he deplored in other people. He had to be allowed to tell his tale, and, in telling it, to draw unfavourable comparisons. Only then could he, in some sort, get his own back against the age which had so woefully insulted him.

"It's a mistake to help the young," he was asserting. "They should be allowed to feel the harshness of the world."

"They will feel that anyhow. There's no escaping it. But surely one may temper the severity a little?"

"Why should one? To what end?"

"Merely to make them happy."

"Happiness!" said Wynnington Temple, eating smoked salmon at a great rate. "That's a condition irrespective of circumstance."

She was surprised to hear him say anything so sensible. "Of course it is," she agreed; "probably to some extent it's a habit of mind, but habits require practice, Mr. Temple, and the young of to-day are too busy experimenting to try anything for very long."

"Yes," he said, and wiped his mouth angrily. "They're content with nothing of proved value. But this business of seeking pastures new goes too far. Think of the verse and the pictures of the present day." His long fingers, trembling with irritation, stroked the stem of his wine-glass. "Look at the acting. Behaviourism! This business of being so natural that you're entirely inaudible and turn your back on the audience! This notion that plays should be so witty that it doesn't matter if they're about nothing at all!" He broke his roll in half with as much vigour as though it were responsible for the decline of the arts.

Rosita hesitated. She too preferred verse that she could understand, pictures which corresponded roughly to life, plays which led somewhere and had an appeal beyond the fifth row of the stalls. But she remembered that this is what happened in every age. New manners were decried, pioneers pilloried, and redress made too late. The list of crucified genius was long, and it applied to every country and every sphere of work: Shelley, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Wagner. . . .

"You don't agree?"

She jumped. Would she never cure herself of being transported from the immediate to something a little less real and seeming of infinitely more significance? "Yes," she apologised, "I do. But, in a way, I wish I

didn't." And in a burst of confidence, she added: "It *dates* one so."

Wynnington Temple was staring savagely at the partridge on his plate, as if he were wishing he had shot that amiable bird himself. "Art," he said largely, "should have universal appeal. When it fails to be comprehensible to the great mass of the public its value ceases."

Rosita helped herself to salt and sighed. There was Shakespeare, there was Milton, there was, for the sake of argument if not comparison, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, but were they always comprehensible? Was not art larger than understanding? Luckily, however, she was not forced to utter mild platitudes, for Wynnington Temple, being a hasty eater, had half-emptied his plate and seemed ready to make a confidence.

"I'm not a young man," he began and paused.

"Nowadays," said Rosita politely, "we are all young."

"I am little short of sixty."

She made agreeable noises, and indeed was genuinely surprised, not at the fact but at the revelation. Why had he told her? Did he want to assure her that the disparity between their ages made any thought of a flirtation with Marina ridiculous? Or was he merely possessed with a fleeting desire to speak the truth and win sympathy? To-day he would be old, spent, hardly treated. But to-morrow? Surely he would revive, perhaps receive an offer from another playwright, recover all his lost self-esteem, and see his name once more in bright lights above the theatre. One thing was certain: this man could never be natural. He had to play a role, and behind the role was a motive.

"Yes," he said, with a sigh, "there's no getting away from one's age. I've played opposite most of the famous actresses of my day, and seen them disappear one by one. At the beginning of the century people saw something like acting when they went to the play. *We* didn't believe the job

could be learned in five minutes. As I often tell your daughter—your stepdaughter, rather—if she wants to be worth anything she's got to go through the mill."

"You think she has talent?"

He looked annoyed. "How can I tell? She can recite and she moves prettily. But she knows nothing. Her knowledge of the world is purely theoretical."

"So I should hope," said Rosita warmly.

Wynnington Temple shrugged his shoulders. "These carefully protected young women can't do more than express drawing-room emotions," he said.

"Perhaps. Anyhow, her father doesn't want her to go on the stage." She spoke a little tartly, and realised at once that she had said the wrong thing.

Wynnington Temple's smile was not altogether pleasant. "So Marina has told me. Not liking to come between father and daughter . . ." He paused, and glanced at Rosita's humorously raised eyebrow. "Well, well," he continued, and his expression grew more amiable, "let it go. Anyhow, I told her I thought your husband was quite right. I daresay she would learn domestic economy very well and make some young man a nice little wife. But . . ." Again his face changed, and looked heavy, angry and yet, queerly, not without dignity. "But the stage is a different matter. It is no use being half-hearted about it: it is no good lacking courage. It demands everything from the men and women who accept it as their profession. It must come first—before any other kind of duty. It is, if you like, a religion."

Rosita did not 'like' at all, but she saw that he was as nearly sincere as it was possible for him to be. He was enjoying the sound of what he said, but he almost meant it. He was very neatly translating his own performances of selfishness into acts of service. Because he had been a popular favourite he remembered only that he had given a great deal—not that he had taken more.

"Marina," he said, "is an attractive little thing, but I doubt, as indeed I have already told her, whether she has sufficient character to take up so exacting a profession as the stage."

"She has plenty of character," retorted Rosita, "if by that you mean strength of will and originality. She has pride too. You see so many girls you probably think she is just like all the rest. You're wrong: she's not. She is capable of great feeling and loyalty: you have only to see it in her attitude to her brothers. If she is married to the right man she will make a very graceful thing of life."

"She has certainly found a champion in you."

Rosita felt silly: why had she said so much? What, after all, did she know about it? Yet she could not bear to listen to Wynnington Temple's belittling comments: she hated the thought that this ageing man, however famous, should condescend to break Marina's heart.

Conscious that her cheeks were flushed, her voice annoyed, she said: "Her father and I have great hopes of Marina." It sounded well, but what did it mean? Briefly, that they could keep her safe and happy. But how? Undoubtedly they would want someone to help them. She looked at the heavy, handsome figure beside her, and thought of Miles Rodwell, with his fresh intolerance, and his young, serious face, and his charming, wholly absurd dignity.

"Have you anyone in your mind's eye?"

Could the man thought-read? She took a spoonful of ice, and said carefully: "Well, nothing definite."

"I gather she doesn't see many people." He pushed aside his napkin, and added: "She's got her knife into the boy's tutor. So she writes to me, anyhow."

Rosita decided that the conversation was getting difficult. Also Mr. Temple had refused the sweet, and was obviously anxious to get on to the coffee and have done with her.

Desirous to be helpful, therefore, she finished the *pêche Melba* in a hurry, sustained slight headache and adjusted her hat to the wrong angle. She really felt quite sorry for her host. She knew she was not looking her best and she was certainly not making up for it by her conversation.

"I hope," she attempted, "that your notes for your book are progressing well?"

"Very," he said. "I hope to go home next week and really start to work. It is impossible to attempt anything here. One is constantly at the mercy of London's indefatigable hostesses." He lit his cigar and added casually: "I've thrown up my part in Blank's new comedy."

"*Have* you?" said poor Rosita, hoping she sounded sufficiently dismayed.

"I was cajoled—I may almost say bullied—into accepting it, but the first rehearsal proved to me the complete impossibility of my continuing. I—I still have possibly old-fashioned notions of the duty one owes to one's public. Such good friends as I possess—and they are recruited from all walks of life—come to see me with the idea of being entertained by good acting. And," declared Mr. Temple, slapping the table, "when I say *acting* I mean it. And I refuse to appear in any play in which I am *not* permitted to act."

Rosita believed him. He could, she knew, act so tremendously that the play was left in shreds.

"It must," she murmured, "have been a great disappointment to everybody."

"It was. The producer—incidentally one of these young fools with no experience and a superabundance of ideas—was practically reduced to tears. I told him he wouldn't have the slightest difficulty in replacing me. There are any number of actors falling over each other for the chance of appearing in a three-act play, full of wisecracks, and entirely lacking in plot."

"But," said Rosita, for, after all, he had given her a

very good luncheon, "they have not got box-office appeal."

"No," he allowed, "no. There's something in a name, of course. Well, it's their own fault: they'll have to get over it."

Exactly to whom he was referring she did not know. Perhaps he was blaming the age. If so, the snag was they *would* get over his loss. And again she felt sorry for him.

"Well," she said, "I pity the man who does take up the part! None of the first-nighters will be able to forgive him for not being you."

Mr. Temple smiled. "I'm afraid that's flattery," he said.

"I should dam' well say it was," thought Rosita. "And *how* the poor creature is longing to get rid of me! Whereupon she gathered up her gloves and bag, and said: "Well, I've got a train to catch. Thank you *so* much. It's been delightful."

On her way to the station Rosita took out her flapjack and examined her face as closely as the jolting of the bus permitted. "Well!" she told herself, "I rather like my hat like that! I needn't have felt half so apologetic about my appearance. What a *difficult* man! How glad, how very, very glad I am that I married Godfrey."

13

"MR. RODWELL?"

"Sir?"

"During the summer term, when you were at school, what form of manly exercise did you patronise, if one may make so bold as to ask?"

"Ask me civilly, sensibly, and at much shorter length, and I'll tell you."

"What games did you play?" amended Hugh, with a surprising docility.

"Cricket was compulsory for a time, but directly I got the chance I rowed."

"Fast and furiously? Were you in the Eight?"

"I was in my last year."

"Did you row at Henley?"

Miles nodded. The pair were walking across country to the Greenways' farm. It was a cold, bright afternoon. The small boy, in imitation of his tutor, was coatless and wore a muffler wound about his throat and chest. Under his jacket he sported a yellow jumper, made by Rosita, who had received stern injunctions to follow closely the pattern adopted by Mr. Rodwell.

These flattering evidences of approval were not lost on the young man, who further observed that his pupil now wore his hair shorter and neatly parted, and, more often than not, was in possession of a clean pocket-handkerchief. He regarded these signs as amiable, but refrained from any sort of comment upon them.

"I can scull," said Hugh. "At least I could. There's no river here."

"There's old Father Thames not many miles away," replied the other. "If you like we'll take a boat out some time."

"You'd coach me?"

"Certainly."

"I hope you're in possession of the proper language." Hugh was so delighted at the prospect that he at once concealed his pleasure in his customary banter.

But Miles paid no heed to it: he understood exactly how nervous Hugh was of letting anyone into his secret. "I had a coach at the Varsity who swore like a bargee," he said. "Personally, I didn't find it wonderfully helpful."

"Did you get your Blue?"

"I did not, alas! I never got beyond my college Eight."

"Oh well," said Hugh indulgently, "that was pretty good." He was silent for a time, and presently enquired:

"At the average rowing school, is a fellow who boats thought as much of as a chap who plays cricket and football?"

"Quite as much. Whether he's rowing for his house or one of the School Eights, he's playing his part just as adequately as a member of one of the elevens or the fifteen."

Hugh said no more, but once or twice during their walk Miles observed him doubling his thin arms and feeling the muscles. The young man was both touched and amused. Hugh's appearance suggested the cox rather than the oarsman, but he had known leggy little boys turn into strapping creatures at sixteen or thereabouts, and already he could see signs of Hugh's physical improvement. As to his mental equipment, it left him in no doubt that the boy could safely be sent up for a scholarship next spring. What *did* trouble him was Hugh's apparent indifference to the customary moral code. He lied when it suited him, repeated improper stories with gusto, and showed not the slightest respect for his father and stepmother.

'It isn't,' thought Miles, in some perplexity, 'as if he fibbed as small boys do to get themselves out of trouble. He obviously enjoys invention. Half his tales of revolutions in Lima, witnessed from their own balcony, and incidents in the British settlement in Hongkong when he and Marina were paying a visit there, are palpably untrue. Yet he tells them well. Maybe he'll make an excellent novelist. The improper stories he's no doubt borrowed from Benedict and, without question, he knows they are—or should be—unrepeatable, without actually understanding why. As to his attitude towards his parents, it's largely Mr. Daleham's own fault: he's given all the children a ridiculous amount of rope and he's only just begun to haul it in. Naturally they're all a bit startled. Thank heaven, anyhow, he had the sense to keep Hugh back from school until I arrived on the scene.'

Which was very arrogant and self-righteous of Mr. Rodwell, no doubt, but it had the saving merit of being true. Thanks to his careful handling, Hugh *was* fast losing his dread of the large and alarming world of his own contemporaries. But no one, except his tutor, knew anything about it. Least of all Rosita, who was fond of congratulating herself over her success in persuading Godfrey not to send dear little Hugh away from home. Mr. Rodwell was such a nice young man, and would doubtless stay with them indefinitely. She had, in fact, a plan, a little secret plan, not unconnected with Marina, for keeping Mr. Rodwell to his employment.

Meanwhile, the victim of her innocent schemes walked the brisk, sunny common, with his red head in the air, thinking of anything but Marina. He was determined *not* to think about her, and when her image intruded he always thrust it angrily away. Since their talk on the loggia that damp Sunday afternoon they had barely been on speaking terms. It occurred to Miles that he had made a fool of himself. He had not meant to approach her in such an apologetic fashion. But she had looked so completely miserable, so soft, so unlike her shallow, lively self that he had been unable to forbid the impulse.

But he regretted it now. They had come near, only to drift still further apart. Anyhow, he told himself furiously, it did not matter, she was nothing to him. Yet, somehow, the memory of that round, distressed face haunted him; he could not forget it even while her bright eyes mocked him across the luncheon table, or her derisive laughter rang in his ears. He knew that she was unhappy and he knew the cause.

'To fall in love with a middle-aged popular actor,' thought Miles, 'is to fall in love with a ghost. And that's what she's done. She couldn't possibly care for Wynnington Temple as a man. It's his fame she loves and that, heaven knows, has been on the wilt for years. Besides, it's all

wrong: chap's married.' And he jumped a stile, and went off down a bridle-track at such a pace that Hugh was left, protesting behind.

"Where's the frightful hurry?" complained the small boy. "Do have a heart. We're only half-way there: you can't possibly expect me to keep that pace up for another couple of miles."

The tutor slackened his pace and laughed. "I'm sorry: I'm afraid I wasn't thinking."

"To judge from your expression," said Hugh, "you were thinking a good deal too much."

"Has it occurred to you that your opinion is not always of particular value?"

"I can't say it has."

"Then I recommend you to consider the matter. You are; in common with most pert young creatures, highly observant. But in your haste to put two and two together you are not necessarily infallible. On more occasions than not, indeed, you are merely foolish and decidedly laughable. If you had had the advantage of mixing with other boys they would doubtless have kicked it out of you."

Hugh whitened, glanced at the other's angry face and held his peace. The rest of the walk was finished in silence. Miles indeed began to feel that he had been a little unnecessarily stiff. However, he deemed it best not to make any overtures towards friendliness at present. It was as well to allow his severe little lecture to be adequately digested.

The pair advanced, therefore, upon the farm, walking at some distance from each other, so that Aldous, standing outside the shack with a bucket in his hand, was well aware something was amiss.

"Hullo!" he called. "How are you? Do go indoors. I shan't be a few seconds. They're all fed except this little lot."

Hugh promptly availed himself of the invitation and

disappeared into the parlour. But Miles followed the eldest Daleham across the muddy path towards the hen-run. He liked Aldous, and, seeing him at work, warm and ruddy, an old pullover and a pair of corduroy breeches and leather gaiters replacing his customary neat suit, he thought that the young man was very worthy of respect. One hardly noticed the awkward limp, and the thick stick, very scarred and caked with earth, seemed less of a prop than a country-man's common equipment.

"Your hens laying well?" he asked

Aldous nodded. "Not too bad."

Miles felt quite impressed at such taciturnity. He expected to hear a great deal about the respective merits of Leghorns and Dorkings, but not a bit of it. Aldous had no intention of being a bore merely because he was doing the work nearest his heart. Unlatching the network gate, he entered the run, while the fowls pushed eagerly about his legs. Quietly and with no pother at all, he scattered the grain, taking out a fistful at a time until the bucket was empty. He then turned it upside down, so that no particles remained, and finally limped back again, looking perfectly serene and happy, and quite unaware of a smudge of dirt on his honest face and a patch of whitewash smeared across his breeches.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," he said.

"My dear fellow! We came over to congratulate you on the success of your water-colour."

Aldous at once looked embarrassed. "Oh, thanks very much. It's nothing really. Cherry made me send it up."

"Far from being nothing," corrected Miles, "I think it's a great feather in your cap. First of all, you get accepted for a show in which many established painters seek in vain to exhibit, and then you're bought by an American connoisseur. Really, Daleham, I think if you're not feeling elated that you're singularly hard to please."

"The money's useful," said Aldous simply. "I don't like being dependent on Father. It's quite a good thing to have a hobby that pays."

"Some hobby!" remarked Miles.

The subject was also being discussed by Hugh and Cherry in the parlour, but with more acerbity.

"Your brother?" the young woman was saying, "your brother is, without exception, the stupidest man in England."

"Dear me," said Hugh, "that's an achievement! The competition must be terrific."

Cherry ran angry fingers through her fair hair, dragging it away from her sharp, clever little face. She looked plain and indignant. "Well, I ask you," she protested, "you've heard who's bought his picture? It's enough to make all the critics sit up and take notice. If he'd a ha'penny worth of sense he'd pack his bags and go to London immediately. Coming to that, it needn't be London, if he really hates it. There's Cornwall: he could go there. Better still, he could go abroad, Brittany for example."

"He's primarily a British water-colourist. He's good at damp meadows and mill streams. When we were abroad he painted condescendingly."

"Bless us," exclaimed Cherry, "you're twice as intelligent as he is, and a great deal more perceptive."

"Oh, I know," said Hugh blandly. "And so is Benedict. And, in her way, the same thing applies to Marina. But I don't see why it should surprise you: we may be—I don't say we are—but we may be brilliant. That's got nothing to do with special, and probably remarkable, talent."

"I believe you're thirty, not thirteen."

"This," said Hugh, sitting down by the log fire with every evidence of enjoyment, "is what I call a conversation. Let's continue. We're agreed that my revered eldest brother is three parts fool and one part genius . . ."

"No," interrupted Cherry quickly, "don't use the word

loosely. He's very far from being a genius. Have you ever seen a Goya?"

"Once, in Spain."

"How did you feel?"

"Extremely ill," said Hugh promptly. "I'd eaten too large a lunch. So all that I can remember is Father saying something vaguely guide-book, and a kind official rapidly conducting me towards a fire-bucket."

"I don't believe that story."

He looked at her admiringly. "You're right. There isn't a word of truth in it. I've never been in Spain. But if I had, that, you understand, is what inevitably would have happened."

"I suppose you lie to amuse yourself?"

"And other people."

"I doubt if it does that," said Cherry. "However, we're not discussing you. Why I mentioned Goya was that even a person with no training at all can tell at a glance that genius is the right word to apply there. And when you get an extremely promising, modern young water-colourist, who's just that and nothing more, there's not much point in trying to pretend that he's anything else. The whole point about your brother is that his work is easy and unaffected and naturally good. If he gave himself half a chance he might do anything. But he won't. He doesn't mind painting an occasional picture, if you please, but learn, discipline himself, *suffer*, not he!"

Hugh stared at the thin, eager little thing, with the angry pale blue eyes and the shaggy tangle of hair. "Suffer?" he said. "Is that important?"

"It's all a part of the art of living, and painting's life."

"Who taught you that?"

"My father. He's dead now."

"I should like to have met him," said Hugh.

She looked at him critically. "I believe he'd have liked you: he had some feeling for oddities."

"It's more than can be said for most people," sighed Hugh. "When you talk about suffering," he went on, "do you mean the unavoidable sort, or the kind that comes through choice?"

"Doesn't it amount to the same thing? You can only be hurt through the thing you love."

He cupped his chin in his hand, and they looked at each other, in a queer kind of mutual sympathy. "One doesn't always know," he suggested, "that one does love it."

"At the back of one's mind one knows. I've heard my father damn the painter's trade to little bits, and declare he wished he were a stockbroker. I met a pianist once who played in an orchestra and he said he'd give anything to be a happy little clerk on a steady three pounds a week—but still he stuck to his orchestra, and my father to his easel."

Hugh's thin little hands were clammy: his eyes shone in his narrow face. He addressed Cherry with a breathless secrecy, almost as though she were his confessor. "I want to be like other people," he said, "but I'm afraid. I know it will cost such a lot. I've got to unlearn everything, and start learning again."

"I think," she said curtly, "you've got the brain to do it. If you were less intelligent it would be hopeless. But you'll know how to discriminate."

"And," he said bitterly, "how to suffer."

"Why should you escape? It's all education. I began young. It's not broken me."

"I only lie," he said, "to the people who want me to be different. I thought at first you were one of them. I do it to try and impress them. You see, I know they think I'm a blot on the landscape, and that's my way of trying to improve matters for them."

"A very poor way," declared Cherry. "They only find you out and think still less of you."

"That's possible, of course. I wonder if Mr. Rodwell does?"

"I expect so," she returned indifferently, Miles did not interest her.

"I shall have to watch my step," declared Hugh. He felt excited and half frightened in Cherry's presence. He had never met anyone quite like her. Her harshness stimulated him, and at the same time awakened his sense of danger. It was a pity, he thought, that she was not old enough to be his stepmother. Not that he had any objection to Rosita. She was a fool, that's all.

"Is Hugh getting on all right?" Aldous was asking Miles Rodwell, as they returned to the shack.

"Very well."

"I expect you find him difficult, but it's not his fault," continued the other. "He's been very delicate and we've all indulged him. He likes his own way, I know——"

Miles laughed. "So do you all."

"Well," defended Aldous, "Benedict has justified his choice, anyhow. Personally I think he was an ass to leave Oxford, but at least he's got a job after his own heart."

"What about yourself?"

"I?" He was so surprised that he stood still in the muddy path. "What do you mean?"

"Merely," said Miles coolly, "that the habit of taking the line of least resistance seems to be peculiar to you all."

"Hear! hear!" said a sharp voice, and Cherry leaned out of the parlour window. "I'm glad to have someone on my side."

Aldous ignored her, but continued to gaze in amazement at the tutor, as he limped towards the house. "I've made a deliberate and sensible choice," he began.

"*Sensible!*" repeated Cherry, in an obstinate desire to join in an argument if any were going.

"I query that too," said Miles, as they entered the parlour. Hugh was no longer there: he had joined Miss Greenway in the kitchen.

The three hovered uneasily by the fire. "I ought to go and wash," murmured Aldous, "but—but the line of least resistance, Rodwell?"

"Certainly."

Cherry looked at him and nodded. "Tell him what you mean."

"Actually it's no business of mine," admitted Miles, "but, since you've criticised the others, I think you've asked for it. Why should you be content with an easy job when you could turn your hand to a harder one? This life may be to some extent physically strenuous, and I know that you find it congenial, but if you put all the energy you apply to it into your painting you'd be an uncommonly good artist. And that, as it happens, is a rarer and therefore more valuable calling than the one you propose to follow."

"Spoken like a schoolmaster," declared Cherry, "but he's right, all the same, Aldous. It's your courage he's calling in question. You've got plenty, just as Hugh has, but neither of you can be persuaded to exercise it."

"Hugh?" asked the bewildered Aldous.

She clapped her hand over her mouth. "There I go, nearly letting the cat out of the bag. I forgot. He told me in confidence."

Miles looked at her curiously. Did she share his secret? And what had made Hugh tell her? He felt a little vexed and jealous. He had hoped, not unnaturally, to be given credit by Hugh's parents for his own perception and delicacy.

"Your other brother, Benedict," he remarked a trifle sourly, "is tarred with the same brush. Journalism's easier than submitting to being educated."

"That's his affair," said Aldous hotly. "And—and if you want to criticise the whole family, why leave out Marina?"

"I don't want to criticise anybody. All I'm saying is . . ."

"A nice friendly little tea-party," interrupted a kind, comfortable voice, as Miss Greenway came into the room, carrying a large tea-tray piled with cups and saucers, plates, milk-jugs, dishes of jam, cream and what not. "Good afternoon, Mr. Rodwell: Hugh tells me you walked over. Why, you're not thinking of going? Oh, but we couldn't possibly let you go."

The young tutor hesitated: he had never felt less like a friendly little tea-party; but he knew that Miss Greenway would be seriously offended if he left. Besides, Hugh, following on his hostess's heels and carrying a plate of buttered buns, obviously intended to accept the invitation.

"Thank you," said Miles, "we—we mustn't stay long. The evenings are drawing in——" Here he caught Cherry's eye and was horrified to observe that the lady was laughing at him. His longing to leave grew intensified.

Luckily Miss Greenway noticed nothing amiss: she was busy spreading the cloth and fussing about her tray.

"We are come," said Hugh, who was perfectly well aware of tension, and not altogether innocent of malicious intent, "we are come to celebrate Aldous' success."

"Success?" said little Miss Greenway sharply. "Oh, to be sure, you mean about his picture. I fancy he doesn't care to have too much importance attached to that; do you, Mr. Daleham?"

"No," said Aldous uncomfortably.

"It'll not turn your head," went on the old woman sagely. "You're a sensible boy, and know that a hobby's a hobby. I don't see *you* wasting time over your paints."

Cherry walked up to the tea-table: she looked very pale and her hands were shaking. "If—if Father were alive," she stammered, "he'd accuse you of blasphemy. And he'd be right. You—you often quote the Bible to me, so for once

I'll quote it to you. What about the parable of the talents? If Aldous rolls his up in a napkin he'll be justly cursed for it, and then there *will* be weeping and gnashing of teeth——"

"That'll do!" commanded her aunt. She looked very vexed: her round, rosy face grew extremely red. "You're a wild, silly girl. I'll have none of that kind of talk here."

"You'll get no other sort from me," stormed Cherry.

The young men looked awkward, but Hugh was charmed. He thought the scene admirable. Fortunately it was not prolonged, for Dan walked in, and, with a muffled ejaculation of despair and fury, Cherry swung her legs over the window-sill, jumped down, and disappeared.

"Well, well," said Dan, after he had greeted the visitors, "this is very pleasant, I'm sure. Is the tea made, Dorcas?"

"No," said his sister, a trifle shortly, and whisked away to the kitchen.

"And how are the hens, sir?" enquired Hugh.

Dan giggled. "You're a character," he announced. "You always ask me that question and I can see a joke with anyone. Thank you, they are very well."

Miles Rodwell looked at the simple farmer, and wondered a little at Aldous' taste. These were good, kind people, but to choose to spend his days with them, when he might be employing himself better, seemed a curious notion. He agreed with Cherry, although he thought her cruel. Yet he knew that there was nothing personal in her attack. She had certainly no dislike of Aldous, perhaps indeed no particular liking for him: it was rather that she had been educated to believe in the sanctity of a certain standard, and she could not bear to see it lowered.

Presently Dorcas returned with the great brown tea-pot and they all sat round the table, while Dan made his little jokes and spread blackberry jam on buttered buns with the gusto of a schoolboy.

It was fortunate that Mr. Greenway was not sensitive to

atmosphere, for his sister was more silent than usual, Aldous had nothing to say at all, and both the guests did little more than reply civilly enough to their host's sallies.

At last Dorcas could bear it no longer. "That girl," she exclaimed, pushing back her chair, "she's missing her tea out of sheer wilfulness; Heaven knows she's scrawny enough. But she must come in! It's too cold out there: she'll be catching a chill."

To everyone's surprise Hugh jumped up. "Shall I go?" he suggested. "I expect I'll find her. She's probably just hanging about."

"There's a kind lad," said Dan approvingly.

Hugh grimaced, but he felt that if anyone came upon Cherry suddenly it had better be himself. And, winding his muffler round his chest, for the wind was biting, he ran outside, and, guided by a feeling that in her circumstances he himself would have made for the nearest and most likely haven, he hurried towards the little grey coppice.

It was colder than ever there: there were indeed little pieces of ice in the clearing, and stiff twigs and frozen fern. Now that the sun was gone the tree-trunks had a stony look: the birds were silent: there was no friendship anywhere.

And presently he saw her, with her face pressed to the cold bark of an oak-tree, and her arms wound round it. She cried silently, but he knew that he had never wept like that: it seemed as if he saw sorrow for the first time. He felt ashamed of all his facile tears, and, barely realising it, arranged with himself never to cry easily again.

She did not notice him as he came up: her eyes were closed and hidden on her arm.

"Cherry," said Hugh softly. "Everybody believes your father really. We know it's the truth. It's only because we're funks that we don't follow it. But he wasn't a funk, and you're not. I'd love to be as brave as you are."

She opened her eyes, and remained as she was, staring at him. "If it had been anyone but you," she began.

"Oh, I know," he interrupted. "Your aunt was coming, but I came instead. You see, I understand. It doesn't seem likely, but I do."

She sighed. "It seems quite likely."

He felt immensely flattered. "Well then, you can count on me." He was not very sure what he meant by that, but he hoped to cheer her up.

"Good," said Cherry, and wiped her face. "It's something to meet a sensible person, anyhow."

"They want you," he said uncertainly, "to come back to tea."

"They would." She shook the wet hair from her forehead and blew her nose. "Well, I'll go. Next week, I'll be back in London, at work again. I'd no intention of staying as long, but my employer took herself off for a pleasure cruise, without warning, and left me high and dry. But she's back now, and all ready to start a new novel with a beautiful foreign background." Her scorn was complete. "She'd do better to write of what she knows through and through—the little world of London's successes."

"Why don't you leave her and get something else?"

"Why should I? I'm a competent secretary and know my job. She pays me what I'm worth, neither more nor less, and I work uncommonly hard. That's all I'm good for."

"It's a lot," said Hugh.

"Don't you believe it," retorted Cherry. "Give merit where it belongs. That's what my father was always preaching."

"One day I'm going to write," said Hugh.

"I shouldn't be surprised. You've got understanding: only try to understand yourself first. Everything comes easy after that."

He caught her cold hand. "Look here," he said. "I—I'll

tell you something. I've made up my mind. It—it's mixing with people that does the trick, isn't it? I mean not funkng the issues. I—I like to hear you talk about your father. I—I'm going to tell mine that I want to go to school next term."

She gripped his fingers hard. "Good for you. You'll like it, you know, even the sticky bits. It's beginning life on a small scale. There's a good deal that'll make you laugh. Perhaps you'll write and tell me? And then, later on, you'll find that mixing with other people has stimulated your imagination enormously, and it will help with your books no end."

"Yes," he said, and his eyes were shining. It was exciting, standing there shivering in the gathering darkness, hearing her talk like that of the future.

"Come on, you're dreaming," said Cherry, "and I'm frozen stiff."

"Well now, you two," said amiable Dan, as they went in, "what were you playing at out there?"

"Shaking the black monkey off my back," his niece returned, as she sat down beside him.

Miss Greenway handed her a cup of tea. "It's freshly made, my dear," she said. "Now eat up, there's a love."

"I've not tasted better scones outside Scotland," said Miles, and his hostess fell to talking of potato cakes and bannocks, and left Cherry in peace.

It was nearly six o'clock before Hugh and his tutor began their walk home, and both were well warmed and replete.

"That's a remarkably sensible woman," announced Hugh.

"Miss Greenway?" queried Miles, in some amusement.

"No," said his pupil scornfully, "I mean Cherry."

The other smiled in the darkness. A woman? She looked little older than Marina. And how much less attractive! Yes, it was no use denying it, Marina *was* attractive. But a child, of course. An annoying, charming child.

"Years," said a small, calm voice out of the darkness, "have nothing to do with maturity."

Miles was startled. "Of whom are you talking?"

"Cherry."

Ah, of course. He had forgotten. He had been thinking of a dimpled, olive-skinned face and a pair of mischievous grey eyes; they certainly did not belong to Cherry.

"Here's our path," said Hugh.

"So it is. Thank you." Really he must not dream like this: it would never do.

"She's got five days to do it in, but I back her every time."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Cherry and Aldous. She'll make him drop his hens and take to painting. You see."

"You think so?" Miles tore himself away with difficulty from his own obsession. "Now why?"

"He's smitten," said Hugh. "Our poor old Aldous has got it. Didn't you notice how he avoided looking at her all the time?"

"I'm afraid I didn't."

"He's never been in love before," said the youngest Daleham, "so he'll have it badly. But she won't care so long as he goes on painting pictures."

"You think she's fond of him?"

"Not a bit. Cherry isn't sentimental."

"Then I don't understand."

"Well, sir, you see, she thinks art's everything, and if he gets to the stage of being ready to do any mortal thing for her she'll pack him off to Chelsea or St. Ives, or any other place that occurs to her, and live happy ever after."

"Callous young woman."

"It's her belief, you see."

"I don't, but you seem to."

"Yes, I do." Hugh hugged himself, but said nothing more. The time was not yet ripe.

To their surprise they were met on the doorstep by Mr. Daleham. "Is Marina with you?"

"No, sir," said Miles, and saw beyond, in the lighted hall, Rosita looking distracted.

"She never went to her classes at Redbury," went on Godfrey. "When she failed to come back at six this evening, we rang up the Principal, who had enquiries made and discovered that Marina hadn't put in an appearance to-day at all."

"Well," said Hugh comfortably, going into the house, "she can't have bolted with Wynnington Temple, because I'm sure he wouldn't have her."

"Is he in London?" asked Miles.

"Yes," said Rosita, who was very pale. "We have been on to the house down here: *she's* at home, but he's at the flat. Besides I know that Marina had a letter this morning."

"I've ordered a car," said Godfrey. "I'm catching the eight o'clock train to London."

"I suppose, sir," began Miles impetuously, and stopped short in confusion. No business of his. He couldn't interfere.

"What is it?" said Godfrey, who was looking tired, anxious and exasperated.

The young man stared at him: hadn't he been preaching courage to the others all the afternoon? "You wouldn't let me go?"

"Oh, *Godfrey*," cried the too hasty Rosita, "I *do* think that would be a *much* better plan. But wiser still . . ."

"And in what capacity would you go?" interrupted Mr. Daleham crossly. "I'm her father, aren't I? I've every conceivable right to walk into that cad's flat and remove my daughter."

"Dearest," pleaded Rosita, "they'll probably be dining

out. You mustn't jump to these dreadful conclusions. Marina is only foolish. They will dine, and go to the play, and then he will drive her to the station, and she'll come home by the last train. Really, I suggest that no one goes to London: but I do think it would be an excellent plan if Mr. Rodwell met that train for us at Redbury. I don't like the idea of Marina coming so far alone in a hired car."

Miles looked a good deal put out. He rather enjoyed the prospect of having a thundering row with Wynnington Temple and rescuing Marina, but the notion of flatly meeting her at Redbury Station did not please him at all.

"Nonsense," Godfrey was saying, "it's no affair of Rodwell's. If Temple's not at his flat I shall wait for him there. I've a damned good mind to threaten him with legal proceedings. As for Marina . . ."

"It's not her fault," said Miles, amazed at the sound of his own voice, "it's all his. He knows every trick of the trade: she's awfully young, she wants someone to take care of her . . ."

"I hate to spoil the story," said Hugh, "but here *is* the lady herself."

14

MARINA, excited and breathless, came into the house, swinging her hat in hand. "Hullo, people!" she said. "You're all looking rather rattled. What's the matter?"

"Perhaps," said Godfrey icily, "you'll be kind enough to tell us where you have been?"

"By all means. I've been to London. I saw Benedict and I've got a job." She leant against the wall, smiling defiantly, her eyes very bright. "I'm going to join the chorus in *The Musical Box*, and the rehearsals begin next week. It was thanks to Benedict that I got an audition: he knows

everyone, that boy. Afterwards—after I'd got the job, I mean—I lunched with Mr. Temple. Benedict, I need hardly add, was *not* of the party."

"You made us very anxious," began Rosita, but Godfrey interrupted her.

"May one enquire where you spent the afternoon?"

She laughed, and the quality of her laughter caused Miles to look at her quickly and with compassion. "Certainly. I spent it alone, seeing the sights of London. They occur to me as being overrated. Perhaps they're better admired in company. But Benedict was too busy to attend to me, and—and Mr. Temple had his book to write." And suddenly, like an angry child, she flung her hat upon the floor and burst into tears. "He wasn't interested," she wept, "and he says the theatre's as dead as a door-nail. He was cross all the time, and sort of sneered, and said I'd be no use. And I thought he'd be so pleased . . ."

"My dear!" said Rosita, coming quickly forward. She thought this scene, this utter lack of control, most lamentable. "You're over-tired. Come upstairs to your room and rest, and we'll talk about everything afterwards."

"No, we won't," interrupted Godfrey, "we'll talk about it now. There's no necessity for you to go away, Rodwell," he added, as Miles, looking very uncomfortable, was moving off; "you can stay here and see the end of this ridiculous spectacle. You'll join no chorus, Marina, and you will continue your classes at Redbury. You can write to the manager, or producer, or whoever it is, and say that you are under age and acted without your father's permission——"

Marina had ceased to cry. "No," she said, with a surprising determination, "I'll not do that. I've got myself a job and I'm going to stick it. Benedict knows of a hostel—it's terribly respectable, Rosita—where I can live quite cheaply. I'm determined to be an actress. I truly am. You can't stop me, Father. Even Mr. Temple can't stop me. I

want it more than anything else in the world—whatever it costs.”

“You heard,” said Godfrey, “what I said just now.”

Rosita looked from one to the other. She admired them both, and suffered the extreme disadvantage of seeing both sides of the question, a quandary to which, incidentally, she was well accustomed. And on an impulse she turned and looked at the tutor, standing alone by the half-open front door.

“Oh, Mr. Rodwell,” she exclaimed, “what do *you* think about it all?”

“Really,” he protested, horribly embarrassed, “it’s—it’s nothing to do with me. It would be most impertinent——”

Godfrey glanced at him. “Um? What would be impertinent?”

Miles’s eyes were fixed on the small, eager figure with the discarded hat still at her feet, and the tear-stains still smudged upon her cheeks. “To disagree with you, sir,” he said slowly.

Hugh, who had been silent all this time, was watching Mr. Daleham’s face. “Why do you want to save us from hurting ourselves, Father?” he enquired. “We’ve got to do it, you know.”

“Go away!” shouted Godfrey, entirely exasperated by this fresh example of unfilial behaviour. “I’m tired of all this. I’ll put a stop to it. I’ll put a stop to everything!” And, oblivious of the fact that rage was making him both incoherent and ridiculous, Godfrey marched into the library and slammed the door.

“Now, darling, go upstairs and get ready for dinner,” said Rosita, determined to be entirely practical and kind. Besides, there was the new cook to consider. It would never do to begin badly by letting her suppose they were unpunctual people.

The new parlour-maid was in the dining-room laying the

table. It was to be hoped she had not heard the high words. It was such a pity to let the maids think one had any natural feelings. 'One ought never to let them catch one off one's guard,' reflected Rosita; 'otherwise the suspicion becomes a certainty.' And she went into the drawing-room feeling doubtful about everything.

There, in an armchair in front of the fire, lay a very muddy Punchinello, half asleep. He wagged his tail and growled a little as she approached.

"Good dog," said Rosita hopefully. The chair-cover, of course, would be ruined, *all* the chair-covers were ruined, for Punch sat where he pleased. As to the rest of the room, still the Oriental tapestries, the much-fringed shawl, the Chinese prints, the unnecessary strips of silk and strings of beads remained. She had been unable to do anything to the place. And, what was far worse, she had not been able to do anything with the children. Except, of course, dear Hugh. At least there she could claim success. Mr. Rodwell seemed to have made the little fellow entirely happy. 'And,' reflected Rosita, 'but for my intervention poor dear Godfrey would undoubtedly have sent the boy to school!'

The immediate problem was Marina. She sighed and sat down by the fire, for there were other problems too: those chair-covers, for example; and the new cook, whose pancakes at luncheon had been sadly disappointing; and the difficulty of setting an English landscape against an Oriental background—or was it the other way about? Anyhow, she felt tired and bewildered, and not very happy: life seemed a singularly untidy business: she really did not know where to begin clearing up.

And what, at the moment, was her rôle? She must have one, that was essential; she had to assume it immediately. Then—the understanding mother? If so, how the sympathetic wife? Well, if the two were to be combined, Marina would have to give up the stage: nothing less sufficed. Then,

if that were established, the child would have to be consoled. And nothing, in Rosita's opinion, was so consoling as marriage. It was a pity that Miles Rodwell had no money: a greater pity still that he had given no very clear indication of how he felt towards Marina. However, perhaps with due encouragement . . . ! And she looked up hopefully as the young man came into the room.

"I was just thinking about you," she said.

Miles glanced at her disapprovingly: she was looking eager and he did not approve of eager people: he wanted someone highly sensible to talk to.

"Since," he began, eyeing her severely, in the hope of chasing that smile off her face, "since you were kind enough to suggest that my opinion about Marina might be of some value . . ."

"*Indeed* I think so," interrupted Rosita, with a fatal heartiness. She looked at Miles with all the sympathy at her command. He was going to take her into his confidence! Then she must help him by showing that he was already there. "I understand *so* well," she said, and kept her pretty head on one side with the most ingratiating kindliness.

Miles immediately felt that he disliked her very much: he thought that she was being silly and unhelpful.

"Oh," he said stiffly, "I'm glad you see Marina's point of view: I thought you didn't."

Rosita's smile wavered, but remained. "I *see* it, of course, the poor darling, but I am quite, quite sure she will be far happier when she comes round to our point of view, and—and has other things far more exciting to think about."

"What things?" demanded Miles.

She blinked. This young man was difficult. "New interests," she ventured hopefully.

He had taken off his glasses, as he always did when he was agitated, and had begun to polish them with nervous energy. "I don't know what you mean by that, I'm afraid,"

he said, "but I should very much doubt Marina regarding any substitute for the stage as particularly effective. Personally I can't for the life of me see why she should. In my opinion this getting herself a job is the best thing she's done yet. And, quite frankly, I don't think Mr. Daleham is wise in preventing her from taking it up."

For a moment Rosita was silent: whither was this leading her? She had really no notion at all. He was on Marina's side, and yet he was a most estimable young man and openly disapproved of the young Dalehams' constant evidence of insubordination. "Godfrey is quite determined," she ventured. "Nothing will change his mind."

"Perhaps Marina may," retorted Miles. "She is with him now."

Rosita gave it up: it was all far too complicated. She looked at Miles's smooth face, and decided that youth, while, of course, being very beautiful, was also very, very tiresome.

The same thought was also passing through Mr. Daleham's mind at that moment. His daughter was perched on the arm of his chair and her hand was, most unnecessarily, linked in his. Not that he objected to the caress, indeed he rather liked it, but it was not easy to be firm and logical under the circumstances.

Marina's cheek was even pressed against his shoulder, and her hair tickled his face. The study seemed very quiet, in fact unusually peaceful.

"You see, darling," Marina was saying, "I've got to leave home some time. I couldn't just stay here, playing second fiddle to Rosita; I must strike out on my own. I'm going to make you so proud of me."

"Well," said Godfrey, "I hope so, I'm sure." He weighed her hand in his. "Why couldn't you have come to me in the first place and talked it over like this?"

"Because you'd never have let me go. I simply had to get the job first."

"I'm not 'letting' you go now. You're taking the bit between your teeth." He sighed, thinking how many useless words he had flung away on her.

Marina kissed him. "I promise to be good. Rosita shall come and see where I'm going to live. Benedict says I shall be as safe there as in a nunnery."

Godfrey gave her hand an awkward little squeeze: this sort of thing was not very much in his line, but he felt that if Marina only gave him the chance he might learn quite quickly. He had never petted his daughter before and he was really almost enjoying it.

"I don't care about that fellow Temple," he said.

"He'll be down here, writing his book."

"Do *you* like him, Marina?"

"Yes," she said, and her face was flushed, "I—like him."

"Didn't he rather let you down to-day?"

"That doesn't make any difference."

He sat still, trying to remember his own ridiculous youth and not succeeding. Was she in love with the fellow, or only in love with love? He couldn't guess. Anyhow he had better say something and risk it being the wrong thing.

"When a man's married," he said, "and falls in love with someone else, there are three paths open to him: he can either get his wife to divorce him; or he can have an affair in secret; or he can do the decent thing and ride away, out of reach of temptation. Now, quite frankly, which do you expect Temple to do?"

Her large eyes met his. "None of the three. He's not in love with me, you see, so there's no need."

Godfrey's hand gripped hers more tightly. He felt that he had never understood her so well. And for once in a way he was not altogether pleased to see Rosita as she came into the room. In the first place he felt sheepish; an hour ago he had been saying forcible things in the hall: he had walked into his study repeating them. And now, alas! it was all too

obvious that he had allowed himself to be talked over. Indeed, worse than that. He had known Marina's arguments before: it was her spontaneous expression of affection which had won him, the touch of her cheek against his, her soft palm pressed against his own. For some twenty minutes he had really enjoyed being a father: he had been shamelessly sentimental, and now, before his wife's astonished eyes, he felt a fool.

"My dears," reproached Rosita, "do you both know the time? I'm afraid you'll be late for dinner."

And suddenly Godfrey wanted to damn dinner: he felt that he could easily endure the loss of a cook but not of his daughter. And he remained where he was, vainly trying to recapture the flavour of the departing mood.

But Marina had already swung her legs to the ground; she was standing up, and laughing and arranging her hair. "Rosita," she said, "behold a reformed parent! Father entirely sees my point of view, and when I go to London it'll be with his blessing."

Godfrey glanced at his wife and, meeting her astounded gaze, assumed his most whimsical expression. He hoped it carried weight: he really did not quite know how else to look.

Poor Rosita did her best to hide extreme disappointment in a too brilliant smile. "Well, darling," she said, "that's *lovely!*"

"Isn't it?" sang Marina and skipped gaily out of the room, leaving a silence behind her.

"She talked me round," said Godfrey at last. It was not quite true, but he could not explain, even to Rosita, how very nearly Marina had corresponded to all the dream daughters of fiction, and how her spirit had charmed and surprised him. She had even reminded him a little, a very little of her mother Henrietta. Naturally one could not tell Rosita that either. It was better therefore to be more kind than veracious.

"I *quite* understand," said Rosita, mustering reinforcements of sympathy. And she sat down in the opposite chair, feeling quite exhausted by lack of success. Miles, from whom she had expected so much, had suddenly ranged himself on the side of indiscipline, and Godfrey, to whom she had hoped to reconcile Marina, had had the temerity to do the reconciling himself.

"Temple seems to have wet-blanketed the whole affair," said Godfrey, "and obviously he hurt poor little Marina's feelings. She still confesses a good deal of hero-worship for him, but that's all right, you know. It'll pass. You said yourself that you would be extremely relieved to discover that he's not secretly backing her up. It makes things far less complicated."

Rosita sighed. Clever men were proverbially stupid on occasion, and Godfrey was no exception to the rule. Would he, she wondered, thank her afterwards if she stressed the dangers of the situation for him now? She decided to risk it.

"Dear," she began, "I'm sure you're wise, but there are one or two things I'd like to point out if you'll let me. In the first place . . ."

"Excuse me just a second, dear," said Godfrey, "but what *is* the time? Because, if I ought to go and change we could discuss this presently, couldn't we?"

She sat still while he took out his watch, exclaimed and left the room. They had called each other a chilly 'dear' and he had remembered the cook. But should one's husband remember the cook on occasions of domestic delicacy? She had been on the brink of fulfilling her part as the sage, wise helpmeet: and he had been thinking of cooling soup and tantrums in the kitchen. It was, she was obliged to admit, thoughtful in its way: it showed consideration. But did it indicate tact? She was less sure of that.

Anyhow, she would not, she was confident, be able to marshal her arguments any better for being kept waiting.

The heat of the moment suited her eloquence best. It was unlikely she would do the subject justice when Godfrey next found himself alone with her and began that rather unhelpful sentence: "What were you going to say . . . ?"

"Oh, there you are," remarked a voice at the door and Hugh came in, closing it carefully behind him. "Look here, Rosita, what's this about Father eating his words? Marina's simply crowing. Personally, I don't think it's at all a bad thing to let her gang her own gait, but isn't it giving Mr. Temple rather a free hand?"

Since this was exactly Rosita's own opinion, she was disappointed to find it was not limited to her own ingenuity of thought, but trotted out by Hugh almost as a platitudinous comment.

"Mr. Temple," she said, lamely enough, "is not acting in London at present. He will be spending his time down here writing his book."

"And when the mood takes him, he will bob up to London," remarked Hugh, "and if he happens to be at a loose end at any time he will probably make tracks for Marina. I daresay the woman who runs her hostel is as much of a dragon as she says, and really will insist on her coming straight home from the theatre after the show's over, but who the dickens is to keep an eye on her during the day? Benedict's too busy. Besides, Mr. Temple's not the only pebble on the beach. Adequately made up, and behind the footlights, Marina may look quite fetching, and she's such a fool anyone may get hold of her."

"Nonsense, Hugh," said Rosita. Actually she thought it extremely good sense, because it was exactly what she had intended to say to Godfrey, but she knew better than to criticise Marina to Marina's brothers.

"It isn't," he assured her. "Personally I'm all for giving Marina her own way, as I said before, but I—I think all this modern independence can be carried too far. Mr. Rodwell

says so, and he's awfully shrewd. What we probably ought to do is let this house and go and live in London ourselves."

"That's an ideal" exclaimed Rosita, forgetting all about her previous disappointment. It certainly *did* seem a notion, for would it not keep Miles and Marina under one roof and eventually bring them together? "I must certainly suggest it to your father," she said. "Why, Benedict would be able to live with us as well! And when Aldous tires of his chickens he will join us, and we shall all be together once more."

The notion seemed delightful. The maids would be more contented, because in the end they always disliked the country, complaining of the lack of policemen, cinemas, and shop-windows, whereas in London they had everything and there was no quiet to depress them. 'Indeed,' thought Rosita, becoming more enthusiastic every moment, 'London would simplify everything.' Hugh was really a very clever little thing.

"I must speak to your father," she repeated.

"I want to speak to him myself," said Hugh. "Because some other arrangement would have to be made about me."

15

ALDOUS was in the lowest spirits. He found Dan Greenway's jokes unamusing, he failed to be rallied by Dorcas' cheerful manner, he lost his appetite and even regarded the hens with a jaundiced eye.

Cherry had returned to London and he had, therefore, no one to tease him, or disturb his peace by constantly dinning into his ears the fact that he ought to be highly ashamed of himself for wrapping up his talent in a napkin.

And yet, oddly enough, it was since her departure that his spirits had undergone their lapse from the normal. Now

that he no longer had to face the challenge of her sharp blue eyes, no longer had to see her shake that fair woolly head at him, or listen to severe little lectures, he was obliged to confess himself lonely. He had actually ventured to write to her, and to illustrate the letter with a sketch of the white lawn and the snow-laden fir-trees; he had explained that the scene was early morning and that he was sitting at his bedroom window. And he had wondered whether she would have the acumen to understand that it was not the hens which had made him rise so early, but the thought, the very tiresome thought, of herself.

In fact Aldous was in love. The event was all the more remarkable because such a happening had never occurred to him before. He did not find the emotion in the least comfortable or pleasing. Indeed it upset his day, gave him sensations of extreme melancholy, and caused him to keep a look-out for the postman in a manner which was hardly dignified.

So unsettled, in fact, did it make him that he was hardly able to endure the kind Greenways' company, and on the Sunday before Christmas obtained permission to go over and visit his father and stepmother.

It seemed to him a long time since he had left home: Benedict and Marina were both in London, carving out careers of their own. They sent him kind and rather patronising postcards, asking, a little derisively, after the hens. He felt a trifle hurt to think that they did not consider his profession as good as theirs.

Perhaps his general mood made him unduly sensitive, but it seemed to him that his father and Rosita treated him with less than their usual affection. They asked him little about his work, and were palpably disappointed to hear that he had left his sketch-book behind. He made no mention of Cherry, and when Rosita asked what the Greenways' young niece was like, he was really too embarrassed to say anything but

that she seemed clever, and was always quoting her father.

"That's unusual," remarked Godfrey dryly.

Aldous agreed that it was. He grew very red and stared at his boots in an extremely awkward manner. Presently he observed that Rosita was looking at him very kindly. Getting up in a great fright, he hastily limped out of the room. He had not the slightest desire to take his step-mother into his confidence.

Hugh, reading comfortably beside the library fire, laid aside his book as his eldest brother came into the room.

"What are you so deep in?" enquired Aldous.

"Only a thing on rowing which Mr. Rodwell lent me," said Hugh hastily, and added: "You're looking very glum. Has Cherry returned to London?"

The other sat down and laid his rubber-tipped stick beside him. "She has." After all, it was useless to hide anything from the youngest Daleham.

"Then why not go there yourself?"

Aldous made no reply.

"It would simplify matters a good deal if we all took up our headquarters in London, as I have already told Rosita," continued Hugh, "but Father remarks, one must admit with some justice, that he bought this house in order to live in it. He does not, it appears, intend to allow himself to be unduly rattled by the activities of his family. Which is as well."

"I agree," said Aldous.

"Once we were settled in London," said Hugh, "the odds are most of us would be on the move again. Marina will certainly have to go on tour, and Benedict is likely to be nomadic for a time at least, while I . . ." He stopped himself and was evidently relieved to see that his brother was not listening to him.

"Do you find the posts here erratic?" he demanded suddenly.

"No," returned Hugh, "but then I am not in love."

His brother requested him, with an uncharacteristic asperity, not to be a fool.

"Violent language! But I daresay it's natural, under the circumstances. Though I'm bound to admit the condition takes people different ways. Mr. Rodwell, who's in love with Marina, grows more gentlemanly and more aloof as his passion increases."

"Rodwell and Marina?"

"Why not? It's almost inevitable, seeing that they were under one roof. Not, I believe, that she returns the compliment. She's still dead nuts on Temple."

"How in the world do you know all this?" enquired Aldous irritably.

"Observation, my dear fellow."

"Well, if you want my opinion, you're a precocious little brute." He spoke with extreme intolerance, since the thought of being himself observed vexed him a good deal. But almost at once he regretted his severity. He knew that Hugh was soft-hearted and might easily be wounded by such uncommonly plain speaking. The small boy's impudence so often ended in tears that Aldous was alarmed, and glanced apologetically in Hugh's direction.

To his surprise his young brother was dry-eyed and calm: he even looked approving.

"It's because I'm among grown-up people so much," explained Hugh. "It's really more my misfortune than my fault. But I'll be better when I go. . . . That's to say, I'll be better soon. Tell me, Aldous, do you know anything about rowing? This book here is supposed to be helpful, but to my mind it makes confusion worse confounded."

"No," snapped Aldous, "I can't row. Why should you want to know, anyway?"

Hugh yawned and closed the book. "Sheer curiosity," he said. "Let's talk about Cherry. Do you know her address in London?"

The other said that he did, and added glumly that he had written to her twice and still awaited her reply.

"It's my opinion," said the younger boy, "that she won't write to you at all unless—or until—you show some signs of profiting by her advice. I don't see why you shouldn't consider it, Aldous. After all, Cherry is quite right. In the long run one's personal comfort really doesn't matter at all."

"That comes well from you."

"Never mind me for the moment," retorted Hugh; "at least I've no noticeable talent which I'm neglecting. Her complaint is that *you* have."

"I'm all right where I am," muttered Aldous.

"So's Dan Greenway." He might almost have been the elder brother: he was calm and reasonable and quite unhurried.

Aldous stared at the comfortable glow of the wood fire. "I don't know why she—and all the rest of you, coming to that—can't leave me alone."

"We do," said Hugh, "reluctantly, perhaps, but you can't complain of family interference. It's Cherry who keeps at it. She thinks you're worth a lot of bother, Aldous. And she bases her opinion on what she believes her father's would have been. And that's not to be sneezed at, you know. He really was rather a great man."

"After his death," said Aldous bitterly.

"You be careful the same thing doesn't happen to you."

"Don't be an ass."

"Well, I admit you're not likely to head a new school of painting, as he did, but Cherry thinks you would be recognised in a remarkably short time if you went to London and worked like a black. I can't think why you don't try it. Cherry says nothing can be accomplished without sweating blood and tears."

"If I went," said Aldous, still staring very hard at the

glowing logs, "it wouldn't be because I want to, but only to please her."

Hugh nodded. "Well, why don't you write and tell her that? I expect she'd be awfully helpful. She knows all about art schools and where you'd get the best masters; and I'm perfectly certain she'd be in the seventh heaven to think she'd won you over."

"She doesn't care a hoot for me," declared Aldous gloomily.

"I'm not so sure," returned Hugh, "and she's taken an uncommon amount of trouble over you. I know she thinks herself that it's only the painter she cares for, but unless I'm very much mistaken she rather likes you for yourself. All women hoodwink themselves over their motives when they're interested in a man."

His brother smiled reluctantly. "You are the oddest little creature! Where d'you get all your worldly wisdom from? I wish to heaven you were right about Cherry, but I'm very much afraid you're not."

"Well, bob off to London and find out."

"It would mean putting Dan Greenway to a good deal of trouble," mused Aldous.

"I doubt it. They'd soon find someone to take your place."

"They'd be disappointed in me. They've no opinion of artists."

Hugh snorted. "You ought to hear Cherry on the subject. She's got no time for them at all."

"They are kind, excellent people," retorted Aldous.

"I daresay. That doesn't prevent them from talking nonsense."

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that if I *did* go, after a time I should get used to living in a town. Perhaps I shouldn't miss all the country sights and sounds as much as I expect. Perhaps, if I were working hard, I

shouldn't have the time to regret all the things I like best."

"Also," suggested Hugh, "the sight of Cherry might compensate you for a good deal."

His brother made no reply. He hated the thought of what he was going to do: but slowly and steadily he was making up his mind to do it. Cherry had succeeded in completely unsettling him. She had deliberately made demands upon his courage and unconsciously laid siege to his heart. He felt as if she had taken all sense of security from him, and substituted for it a most unwelcome, but nevertheless irresistible, sense of adventure.

16

MARINA sat down on the edge of her bed, and wept hot humiliated tears. Never before had she cried and not been comforted, so that for sheer lack of sympathetic audience she left off pretty quickly.

But her unhappiness remained: the quiet ugly little hostel bedroom frightened her: the sparse furniture seemed stiff and impersonal, as though it were used to strangers; there was a little printed card of rules framed and nailed to the wall; the carpet was a decorous grey, the curtains a lamentable peacock blue, and on the mantelpiece was a melancholy calendar depicting a flock of sheep returning to the fold beneath a leaden winter sky. Nothing could have been more well-meaning, or more calculated to strike depression in the heart of the spoilt Marina.

She was frightened by the brisk and somewhat formidable proprietress, shy of the other girls with whom she shared the evening meal, alarmed, above all else, at the loneliness.

Nor was this all, and none of it the cause of her present tears. It was at the theatre that Marina had met with her greatest shock. The revue, in which she had been selected

to play, was a high-brow affair, and the producer and stage manager were serious and very clever young men. The girls of the chorus were expected to do more than merely sing and look pretty. It was necessary that they should have wit and intelligence. *The Musical Box*, in short, was one of those carefully cultured entertainments which did not appeal to the majority and took a pride in the fact.

Marina appeared for the first rehearsal, looking her best, and cheerfully confident. By the time the day was over she was completely exhausted and entirely miserable.

The very modern music almost stopped her dancing feet; the songs were so brilliant and so topical as to demand more speech than singing; and the general atmosphere was one of extravagant originality.

Poor Marina found that she could do nothing right: she listened for rhythm and found there was none, so that her natural gift for dancing fell to pieces: she sang easily, and was roundly rated for not giving point to the epigrams: she looked soft, charming and impish and she was flatly told that nothing could be more unsuitable.

She did not know what to make of it. It was terrible to be scolded by exasperated young men, in front of all the others. Nobody helped her: again and again she was pulled up, and implored, ordered, sometimes almost coaxed not to do so badly.

In the dressing-room the other girls were agreeable but indifferent. They did not in the least resemble the chorus girls she had read about in books. They were all very high-brow themselves, and talked with a terrible intelligence and superiority, which left Marina quite tongue-tied. None of them was beautiful and some were not even pretty, but they knew their job. They could do anything with the difficult music, they understood the point of those alarmingly clever songs, they looked as they were expected to look, slender and pale and quite exceptional.

Marina envied them. She could see that her own round-cheeked Southern charm was quite out of place. She even wondered why she had been chosen at all, and was informed by some of the girls that they had heard the producer say he thought with a little training she might be taught to look Russian.

"Why?" asked the simple Marina.

Because, they told her, very much surprised at her ignorance, it all helped the general atmosphere. It was not as if this were an ordinary revue, and the more cosmopolitan it was the better.

"Well," Benedict had said when Marina confided her troubles to him, "I really don't think you've got anything to complain of. You can't expect to find it all easy-going. I may as well tell you I had hard work to persuade them to give you an audition. It's my belief you wouldn't have stood an earthly in an ordinary show. But *The Musical Box*, from all I hear, isn't ordinary. It's extremely intelligent."

Marina began to wish she had never heard the word. 'Intelligent' songs, dances and music dogged her: she was scolded by 'intelligent' young men, and patronised by an 'intelligent' cast.

No wonder she sat upon her bed and wept. She was tired out and dispirited. The thought of going down to supper with the other members of the hostel appalled her. There again she was out of it, since they were all business girls, very efficient and quiet, without much sympathy for the too talkative new arrival.

"I've nothing against the stage," the proprietress had kindly informed Marina, "but I've made my rules here and they've got to be kept. So it's no visitors at any time, and it's indoors by ten-thirty sharp, except when you're acting, and then it's back the moment the show's over. I never give a latch-key and I lock up at half-past eleven whether you're in or out. So you know what to expect. I like

to make myself plain: it's only fair on both sides."

This, then, was life with a capital L. It seemed to Marina that its charms were exaggerated.

She sat, therefore, in her bedroom, clutching a damp handkerchief, and wondering what her father would say if she took the first train home in the morning.

London seemed horribly friendless. There was Benedict, of course. But he was always busy. He loved his job and no longer went about with a sulky face and a bent head. He had friends, but they were not Marina's sort, for they were clever young Left-wingers who took art and politics with an equal seriousness.

"Men always have the best of it," wailed Marina. It seemed incredible that her dreams could have come to this, to a cheerless little hostel bedroom, to humiliation in the theatre and indifference outside it.

Dismally, she dried her eyes and decided to go downstairs into the communal sitting-room. It was six o'clock and the other girls had not yet returned from work. In the hall, upon a green baize board girdled with tape, were the letters which the afternoon post had brought.

Marina examined the board to see if there were anything for her. And at once her heart leapt. There was the familiar, but all too rare, blue envelope scrawled across with her name in that large and flowing hand! With burning cheeks she took Wynnington Temple's letter and hurried into the empty sitting-room. It was good just to hold it, to shut her eyes and feel happiness. Then, standing by the window, she slowly slit the envelope and took out a single sheet of notepaper.

"DEAR MARINA" (she read),

"I'm up in town for a night or two. If you care to dine with me this evening ring up before seven. And keep my whereabouts to yourself. I'm supposed to be in

the country and don't want to be bothered by indefatigable friends.

"Yours,

"WYNNINGTON TEMPLE."

She read the letter twice before she could believe her good fortune. Then she danced into the hall, seized the telephone receiver, asked for the number, placed her pennies in the box, and accepted Mr. Temple's invitation, all in so feverish fashion that she hardly knew what she was doing.

Then she tore upstairs and changed into her best frock and her most becoming hat. He had told her not to dress and had explained that they would dine in Soho. Nothing, she thought, could be more romantic, and, hurrying off to the Underground Railway, she suddenly discovered that she liked London very much indeed.

She was, however, so new to the mysteries of the Tube, and to the crowded streets, that she twice lost her way and finally arrived at her destination in a fever lest she was late. Alarm made her large eyes brighter than ever, and deepened the colour in her round face.

Mr. Temple greeted her very kindly. He sat down with her at a table in a corner of the long low room, and looked at her with amused approval. "Well," he said, "taking the bit between your teeth seems to suit you."

"I'm not so sure," replied Marina

He raised his eyebrows. "Why, what's the trouble?"

"Well, before you rang up I was thinking of drowning myself in the Thames."

"Dear me." He signalled to the head waiter, addressing the man by name, thereby impressing Marina extremely. She was sure that Godfrey could never enter a restaurant with so knowing an air, nor summon head waiters with so much easy patronage. People were looking at them: they recognised that famous profile, and included Marina

in their interested curiosity. Never had she felt so happy.

"And why," Wynnington Temple was asking, "were you so anxious for a watery death?"

"Everything had gone wrong for me," she explained. "I loathe and detest the hostel: it's as grim as a prison. And I'm having a dreadful time at the theatre."

"That's your own fault. What in the world made you pitch on a piece like *The Musical Box*?"

"Benedict knows the producer. I can't think that it says much for Benedict's taste. I consider he's a most impossible young man. And the others are no better. I'm scolded and made to look a fool all the time."

"You'll get used to it," he said; "you've got to go through the mill. I agree with you about the gentleman in question, but you'd have found much the same thing anywhere. You've got to learn your job, my lady. I daresay these over-educated smart alecs are very biting and sarcastic, in common with most of their breed, and I admit I'm sorry for you. But in the theatre proper—I don't count these bits of high-brow nonsense—you'd have found discipline and plenty of it."

"I suppose so." She drank her soup hastily. She had not expected him to sympathise with her, it was not his way, but somehow she did not care for the tone in which he spoke of Benedict's friends. Of course she ran them down herself, but not because they were educated and intelligent young men, but because they had been so severe with her. She had, however, the wit to realise that was not Mr. Temple's quarrel with them. And somehow she knew that he was jealous of their advantages. She even felt that he despised her a little, as though she were playing at being an actress. And as this doubt of him crept in, not for the first time, she recalled how casually he had invited her to dine with him, and how eagerly she had responded. The thing seemed unequal. Then again, they had not gone to one of his pet and

fashionable restaurants, but to this queer little place with its odd-looking clients, and its watchful, slightly smiling head waiter. *'Keep my whereabouts to yourself.'* Was he afraid that she would boast of going about with him? Was he, in fact, slightly ashamed of himself? But if so, why? Surely there was nothing wrong in asking her out to dinner? And she thought suddenly of little weather-beaten Mrs. Temple, wearing one of her ridiculous hats, marching doggedly down the village street. . . .

"You're very quiet, Marina. Are you tired?"

"Not a bit."

"You certainly don't look it. Well, this is better than catching occasional glimpses of you in the country. I'd meant to go over to Redbury some time and take you out to tea, but I decided it was a bit too risky."

She looked up and saw his dark eyes looking into her own. He was smiling and obviously expected her to smile too. It seemed as though he were inviting her to share in a conspiracy. For the first time she noticed the lines in his face and that his mouth looked tired and old. And all her elation died. She wished she had not come.

Wynnington Temple did not seem to mind her silence. He continued to smile. "You're a shy little thing for all your impudence. And to think you're now a little actress! Tell me what you have to do, and how it is that you get bullied."

She pulled herself together and tried to amuse him, but it was not a very successful effort. Spontaneity was difficult. She wished herself at home. She thought how kind Godfrey had been when she sat on the arm of his chair, how gentle Rosita always was! And Miles, catching her out in tears, how strangely sympathetic that aggressive young man had been! Of course he was annoying and ridiculous, but. . . .

"I daresay in a month or two they'll have licked you into shape," Wynnington Temple informed her. "As I told you,

before, you've got to put up with it. It's no worse for you than the others."

"They're better at it than I am, so they don't get it so hot."

"Very likely. They've probably been bred in a harder school. However, if you don't share their advantages you may eventually catch up with them."

She did not like that, and summoned up enough courage to say: "I shouldn't have thought it was so much a matter of origin as originality and—and the capacity to ignore a tune."

"Then you can think again," retorted Wynnington Temple. "If you imagine that being brought up soft is an advantage you're very much mistaken. I grant you, of course, that the state of the theatre to-day leads one to believe that anything may happen, and that if a man has had a college education or a girl is the daughter of a peer, it's popularly supposed he must be the best theatrical producer in the town, and she the most distinguished actress. But the fact remains that those of us who have worked our way up from the bottom and arrived at the top—or as near the top as makes no odds—are the people to whom attention should be paid. We know our job——" and he thumped the table with a suddenness which startled Marina a good deal. "If the theatre is not to come to a sudden and most lamentable end it must be left in the hands of those who understand our calling. We don't want change, we don't want intruders, we've got our traditions and we intend to cling to them." Here he paused in his speech, and fixed his guest with an angry eye as though he missed the familiar applause.

"Yes, of course," said Marina meekly.

"D'you know," he demanded, "why I threw up my part in that damned show the other day? It's because I've got principles and I intend to stand up for them. It was time someone made the gesture: these innovations are ruining

English drama. The theatre's going to blazes and something's got to be done about it."

"I expect you'll soon get another part," said Marina tactlessly. Unlike her stepmother she had no notion how to deal with the wounded ex-matinée hero.

Temple glared at her. "Another part!" he repeated. "Are you aware that half the managers in London are falling over each other in an effort to persuade me to play the lead in Tom, Dick or Harry's modern comedy, and that it takes me all my time to refuse them?"

"What I meant was," explained poor Marina, "that you'd soon get something you really liked." She was distressed to think that he had at present no engagement, yet secretly she felt a little fonder of him in his present condition, rather than as the all-conquering star.

His bitterness disturbed her, and she was frightened by his anger, yet she found him more real and less remote than ever before. If only he did not despise her and seem to hold in contempt her whole upbringing!

"It seems to me," she remarked, "that you bully me almost as much as my producer. I've had nothing but scolding all day."

"Ah," said Wynnington Temple, quite restored to good humour, "but you like it from me, you know that you do."

"Up to a point. But you did tell me, if you remember, that—that I'd make a good actress one day."

"Did I? When?"

She swallowed her chagrin. "One afternoon, in your garden."

"The time I kissed you?"

Marina's flush deepened. "Yes," she said.

"I very much want to kiss you again," he declared. "It's a pity we're not still in the garden."

Marina agreed with him, for in that case it would have been queerly comforting to know that home was not far off,

and plenty of security in the background. Here it was very different. She no longer felt the same as she had done when she opened Wynnington Temple's letter. She was still flattered and excited: still he seemed to her a very remarkable person: but the eager, unthinking responsive emotion which he had aroused was no longer there.

Looking at him under her long eyelashes, Marina had the impression that she was in the presence of a stranger. Yet, in spite of a vague sense of danger, she was surprised when he invited her to go back to his flat with him. She heard her own voice gently refusing, and was relieved to see that he looked more amused than annoyed. Doubtless he assumed that her resistance was not likely to be long-lived.

Soon after she got up to go, and declaring that he would take her back to the hostel, he put her into a taxi and made practised love to her at intervals during the journey.

But Marina did not return to her earlier mood. Nor was she very elated when he kissed and whispered to her. The whole thing appeared very much in the nature of an anticlimax. For months her head had been full of this man, and now she seemed to see him for the first time as he really was.

"I shall be coming to London again shortly," he said, "and I'll drop you a line. We'll do this again, won't we?"

She felt very tired as she went indoors. In the dim hall light she saw a solitary letter upon the green baize board. Slowly she took it down and carried it up to her room. It was from Miles and read:

"MY DEAR MARINA,

"One supposes that by now you are half-way to becoming Mrs. Siddons or the divine Sarah. Have you time to remember the obscure, and even to drop him a postcard to say that all is well with you?

"When your name is in bright lights above Shaftesbury

Avenue he will be a humble, but no less adoring, member of your enthusiastic audience.

"Perhaps, of your charity, you will fling him a smile.

"Meanwhile he has the honour to remain,

"Your faithful servant,

"MILES RODWELL."

Marina stared at her own flushed image in the glass. "I don't want to be Mrs. Siddons," she said. "Oh Miles, I want to go home."

17

ALDOUS sat in the little hot and overcrowded room, feeling tongue-tied and ill at ease. The young men who lounged in the arm-chairs, perched on the table, and even squatted on the floor, were Benedict's friends, not his. He could not enter into their enthusiasms and interests: their talk was clever and apparently well-informed: it even had an air of authority. And Benedict, a host in the best of spirits, held his own with them in a manner which won his elder brother's admiration.

Politics, poetry, drama, music, the ballet, the subjects were taken up, discussed and dealt with faithfully. Only Aldous had no contribution to make. He sat by the fire, with his stick between his knees and let his pipe go out. He was thinking of Cherry, and in the blue haze of cigarette smoke seemed to see her thin, vivid face.

Presently he noticed that the conversation had slackened: the young men were looking towards him with respect, and Benedict was telling them about the recent success of his picture. Aldous grew red and mumbled replies to their questions. He told them that he had come to London in order to study at an art school for a year, and that mean-

while he hoped to sell a picture or two, and perhaps to do some illustrating for a publisher.

"Let's have your sketch-book out and show them what you can do," said Benedict.

Aldous felt more embarrassed than ever, but he produced the book and saw it passed excitedly from hand to hand.

"My faith!" exclaimed one young man, "you can certainly paint. Look at this one, you chaps! A school, did you say? I wouldn't mind betting you've nothing to learn."

"That's what I tell him," said Benedict, who was generously enjoying his brother's success.

Aldous knocked out his pipe, hoping to hide his hot face. He wondered if he should ever get used to hearing himself discussed. Lately it seemed as if he had had nothing but embarrassment to contend with.

In the first place he had had to eat humble pie and tell Godfrey that he had changed his mind. His father had undoubtedly behaved admirably, and neither he nor Rosita had uttered a syllable of reproach. In fact they had applauded his decision and given him every help in carrying it out. Nothing could have been kinder than their treatment, and Aldous felt quite distressingly uncomfortable about it. He dared not tell them the real reason for his *volte-face*, and was disturbed to the depths of his conscientious heart at their assumption that it was for love of his art that he had come to see the wisdom of eschewing chicken-farming.

As for the Greenways, their reception of Aldous' stammered apologies, and their acceptance of the situation were typical of both of them. Dan took the situation calmly, giggled a little, and soon began to talk of something else, as though the whole affair were of relatively little importance.

Dorcas, however, was hurt and outspoken. She blamed her niece for having upset Aldous, declared that she thought that he had more sense, and generally rated him roundly.

The young man found his last few weeks at the farm

distinctly difficult. He was almost glad to get away, and when Benedict met him at Waterloo Station, with the news that he had found his brother a room in his own pension, Aldous' spirits began to rise. After all, he would soon be seeing Cherry, and he would be able to tell her of the sacrifice he had made for her sake.

But presently his elation died. All that he got from Cherry was a curt postcard to say that she was glad he had come to his senses at last. She did not even suggest their meeting! Benedict assured him that all women were like that, and that it was better to have nothing to do with any of them.

"They only spoil a man's career," said Benedict magnificently.

So poor Aldous had to set about the arrangement of his classes, and endure the ordeal of hunting for a picture-dealer who was interested in English landscapes, and suffer the alarm of being interviewed by a publisher with a view to obtaining a commission to illustrate a new book on the sights of London.

To a young man of Aldous' shy and unnecessarily modest temperament all this was refined torture. Nor was he by any means happy, setting up a camp-stool and easel in Temple Bar and being watched at his work by every casual passer-by.

Even his classes and lectures were irksome to him, involving of necessity fresh contacts and the stimulus of acquaintances. So the New Year came and he went on doggedly, without sight of Cherry, yet all the time conscious that he was doing the thing of which she approved.

Now and then he saw Marina, who was playing in *The Musical Box*, and not looking as if she liked it very much. He wondered whether she knew that Wynnington Temple was going to America to play in a film. Certainly he had never seen her look less happy.

"Oh, I don't know," Benedict had replied, when Aldous had confided his impression, "she's awfully Russian just

now, you know; her part demands it, and it's all in keeping to look as if she were on the brink of tears the whole time."

There was no doubt about Benedict's contentment, anyhow. He and the other young men discussed their cheerful panaceas for the world's improvement, condemned the efforts of their elders, and talked boldly of a renaissance and the building—by youthful architects—of the New Jerusalem.

It was true Benedict collected more editors' rejection slips than seemed quite wholesome for a budding poet, but he took it all in excellent part. When verse was *really* good, he explained, no one would look at it. Luckily all that would be altered later on. When the revolution—which was not to be in any sense a violent or physical one, but merely a mental reverse, and the wholesale resignation of all men over thirty in influential circles—when that happy event occurred, Benedict's poetry would be recognised as it deserved.

"I *say*," remarked the young man, who still had Aldous' sketch-book in his hand, "this makes me feel a bit silly. Here we've been gassing all the evening, and to the best of my belief you've not opened your mouth, and yet you're the only fellow among us who's quite unmistakably arrived."

"I—I'm no good at talking," muttered Aldous.

"Perhaps not, but can't you paint, by Jove! Do you know X? He'd be interested in this. I'll take you to his studio on Sunday, if you like."

Young Daleham gaped. X was one of Cherry's heroes. She said he was the best water-colourist in England. "Thanks awfully," he stammered, "I—I'd like it."

"It's the deuce of a job to get him to go anywhere," declared Benedict, "but X, I admit, *is* a bit of a bait."

"If he thinks you're any good," said another, "he'll make you work like a horse. It's his idea of a compliment. He'll then look at your stuff, as like as not tear it in half, damn you to little bits, ask what you're wasting his time for,

give you two or three invaluable hints, and start you off again. He's the best-hearted fellow in the world, really."

Aldous agreed doubtfully. He felt that Dan Greenway and the hens were more in his line. However, he was grateful to his new friend's kindness; and, egged on by Benedict, he decided to summon up all the social courage he possessed and take his sketch-book with him on his visit to X.

When Sunday arrived he felt quite appalled at his own audacity. Accompanied by his genial sponsor, he travelled by bus to Chelsea, watching with a wistful eye the cold, wintry streets and thinking regretfully of the countryside he so greatly preferred.

His companion strove to cheer him up with an incessant flow of conversation. "I shouldn't get windy about old X," he said. "He'll take you all right. He's even been extraordinarily kind to me, and I'm only a poor devil of an art critic. Of course he says I'm thirty years too young, half-baked and totally uneducated, but in spite of that he *does* read my articles, and he's not the man to waste his time out of mere amiability. Do stop looking so glum: why are you glowering at the streets like that? Don't you like London?"

"I like the country better," said Aldous.

"Grand for a holiday, of course, but the town's the place to work in. Incidentally, I can't get over you sitting on a camp-stool in an east wind at the street corner, unless you really liked it. Frankly, don't you love your work?"

Young Daleham hesitated. No, he loved Cherry. But now, in the queerest way, she seemed so much a part of his work that he could hardly dissociate the two. And he said slowly:

"Well, I—I suppose I do."

A confusion of talk rose from the studio as the two young men entered. Aldous had a bewildered impression of a number of young men and women, all rather eager and

earnest, standing in little groups, or wandering about admiring the unframed pictures on the walls.

Limping across what seemed a wide expanse of polished floor, feeling conscious of his infirmity and extremely nervous of his reception, he drew near a big, fat, bald-headed man with a grey beard and a pair of alarmingly shaggy eyebrows. This person was dressed in a loud check suit and wore a remarkable flowing tie. It was, in fact, the formidable X, his host.

Hot and despairing, Aldous raised his eyes and was surprised to meet a genial and twinkling pair, positively beaming welcome. A large hand shook his own warmly: a loud and hearty voice remarked: "Well now, this is an event! Your reputation, young man, has travelled ahead of you." And he clapped Aldous on the back. "I've heard all about you. You've begun well. Where's that girl who's been singing your praises in my ear? Cherry, come here this moment."

Aldous gazed at X as though he were a conjuror who had just brought off a remarkable trick. He couldn't think of anything to say. X, however, did not seem in the least surprised. He flung his other arm round Cherry's shoulders as she came up, and, still keeping fast hold of Aldous, continued: "She thinks it's all due to her influence, of course, but you and I know better, eh? I saw your little water-colour at the exhibition. Nice work. You've brought your portfolio? Good: you'd better leave it here. I'll look at the stuff at my leisure. Where's that youngster who introduced you? I want him. He's writing brilliant nonsense in one of these new weeklies and he's got to stop: he's too clever by half, that fellow. I must speak to him."

Cherry plucked at Aldous' sleeve. "Your audience is over: but he'll remember you again before you go."

He looked at her: she was as compelling as ever. "Oughtn't I to thank him?"

"Later on: not now. You gaped like a fish, but it doesn't matter. It's easy to see he's taken a fancy to you. And once he's done that, you're all right. X hasn't got a temperament like some of them. He's loyal and terribly kind, in spite of his blistering tongue. Since Father died he's been goodness itself to me."

Aldous felt a sudden spasm of jealousy. "Is he married?"

"He's not such a fool," declared Cherry. "He started from nothing and had to work his way up, and he wasn't going to saddle himself with a wife when he could barely support himself. Besides, he's a woman-hater, anyhow—in the matter of wives. What made you break away at last?"

Aldous grasped his stick very tightly. "You," he said.

But the effect of his confession was not satisfactory: her blue eyes did not soften and her severe little mouth was pursed in disapproval. "What a rotten reason," she said; "it's the work that counts."

"Not with me."

"Then the sooner you change your mind the better."

He had not expected cruelty. It was like a blow in the face. In his dismay he dropped his stick with a loud clatter on the floor. People turned their heads to look at him. Painfully he bent down and picked up the prop that so suddenly seemed to him hateful. And, righting himself, he stared with sudden anger straight into Cherry's eyes: if he read pity there he felt he would never forgive her.

But pity was not what he saw: a quite different emotion seemed to possess her. If it hadn't been absurd he could almost have supposed that she was proud of him.

"Parties don't suit me," he mumbled, "I'm too clumsy."

"They don't suit me either," said Cherry, "but we'll have to put up with them—you and I."

He looked at her eagerly. "Together?"

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't mind any party if you were there. I've been

working all these months simply because of what you said. And I'm beginning to see what you mean. At least I—I'm finding I can stick it, you know. Even when I most miss the country, and hate staying indoors for my classes, or painting more or less in the middle of the traffic, I find I can get over everything when I think of you."

They were standing apart, by the wide window, overlooking the bare trees and river. He was trembling at his own rashness, afraid even to look at her. And when she said nothing, he went on: "Of course I—I understand that I rather annoy you. I'm very slow, and then I'm lame: I mean a sort of cripple . . ."

Her bony little hand shot out and gripped his. "Shut up! You know you're not fool enough to believe that matters. I—I like you better than any man I ever met, but I'm not going to spoil your life as Mother spoilt my Father's. An artist should be free . . ."

"Oh, Cherry . . . !" he began, but she interrupted him.

"I know what I'm talking about. You're ridiculously young . . ."

"You're younger."

"I doubt it. But even if I am that only proves what I've been saying. We mustn't get sentimental, Aldous."

"Why not?" he demanded. "Why shouldn't we? Oh Cherry, I've given up country-life just for your sake, and—and I'm prepared to wait until I've got something real to offer you."

"I don't want you to give me anything," she said, staring at the cold grey river, "I want you to keep it all for yourself. You must learn to be selfish, Aldous. It's part of a great artist's equipment. You must put the importance of your work before everything else. Why, you're not yet twenty-one! In ten years' time . . ."

"In ten years' time," said a voice behind them, "if he really works he'll be an uncommonly good water-colourist," and X pushed between them. He was holding Aldous'

sketch-book in his hand. "I stole this from the hall," he said, "and it interests me. We'll go into technicalities another time, but I'll tell you this: I've not seen such hopeful stuff for an age."

"There you are!" cried Cherry.

"I—I'm awfully grateful to you, sir," mumbled Aldous.

X looked at him. "If I recommend austerity, a complete devotion to your work, and an air of detachment towards everything else, will you follow my advice?"

"Of course he will."

"Hold your tongue, Cherry! Let him answer for himself."

The studio was half empty: most of the guests had gone, and some were wandering round the little adjoining gallery. Aldous was conscious of a queer silence: he knew that Cherry was watching him with a strange fierce hopefulness. And, with a sinking of the heart, he also knew that it was impossible to disappoint her.

"Yes, sir," he said, and his fresh face whitened, "if you said that, I—I'd do it."

Cherry gave a little gasp: she was looking at him with a pride that was almost possessive.

X nodded, pulling at his grey beard. "Good boy, you've given the right answer. Now, come and look at some of the things in my gallery." And as he led Aldous away, he added almost casually: "Cherry's father was my best friend: he ruined his career by a fatally early marriage. A wife and children are a millstone round the impoverished painter's neck. And Cherry knows it. Make your name first and your home after. Incidentally, it's fairer on the woman."

"One can't expect a girl to wait indefinitely," muttered Aldous.

X snorted. "Why not, if she's the right sort? In your case, by the by, I should say that there will be a very definite limit to the period of waiting. That's to say if you really intend to use your gift as it deserves."

Was this X of the blistering tongue and overwhelming manner, this quiet and incredibly kind man who talked so gently and with such great encouragement?

Limping across the floor, a little short of breath from all the excitement of the moment, Aldous experienced the strangest sensation of consolation and distress. And suddenly he felt an almost desperate boldness, and looked up at his mentor as he said: "From my point of view, it's really Cherry who matters. I—I think she's wonderful. At home they—they're frightfully nice to me, but the others do everything so much better. And then there's my leg, you see. But Cherry for some unknown reason believes in me . . ."

"And very rightly. Also she'll stick to you. You can rely on that. I've known her since she was a child." X patted him on the back. "Don't worry so much, young man. You believe in your girl, and I promise you she won't fail you. And for her sake you're going to sweat your damndest. You needn't think I'm going to let you off anything. You're going to work like a black."

Aldous, very red and embarrassed, a state to which he was becoming uncomfortably accustomed, was about to thank his new distinguished friend when he discovered that X had moved away to join a group of young people in the lighted gallery. Thus Aldous was free to roam about by himself. He was vastly relieved at this, and even glad that Cherry had disappeared. He wanted to adjust his ideas and to discover where he stood. But as he walked slowly round the gallery he began to forget himself. For here were the great classics, the masters of the past. Here colour, line and atmosphere were inspired, here was something larger than individualism, something more elemental than the perplexities of the moment, something more spiritual than any one man's concern.

Walking alone, held by a whole-hearted and intelligent enthusiasm, Aldous knew that he had chosen wisely.

No one could have been more apologetic than Miles Rodwell, no one more humiliated than Hugh. It was useless for Godfrey to blame the unexpected change from a mild February to a ferocious March, or for Rosita to declare that if anyone was responsible it was herself for not foreseeing an inevitable happening. The fact remained that after a week's sculling on the river, Hugh had retired to bed with congestion of the lungs.

In his enormous anxiety to prove himself hardy the small boy had endured a long and draughty bus ride without complaint; had kept his teeth from chattering, with the utmost difficulty, as he changed at the boat-house; had put all his energy into the business of improving his style, worked himself to the point of exhaustion, and on the journey home suffered a tiredness and sense of gradual chill which wracked his frail frame.

But so great was his anxiety to show himself a respectable oar, and so anxious was he to emulate his tutor in physical vigour, that he hid every sign of pain and discomfort from his elders, and only gave in when a fainting-fit one morning caused Rosita to put him to bed and take his temperature.

Afterwards it was almost a luxury to be ill: he had only to lie in bed and give himself up to the inevitability of pain: he had no longer got to tackle the exhausting task of pretending that it didn't exist.

"His pluck," remarked Miles, "is completely staggering. What he must have endured! By sheer force of will he seemed absolutely bent on turning himself into a competent oar."

"I wonder why," mused Godfrey, "it would be of no use to him."

The other held his tongue. He was not going to give

Hugh away, especially at this time of day when school looked remote enough. "Is he very bad, sir?"

"No, but he's certainly ill. We've warded off pneumonia, thank goodness; he's a delicate youngster, no doubt of it. Pity, because I'm not certain that he's not the most intelligent of the bunch. The doctor recommends sea air." Godfrey looked worried. "I don't know, I'm sure," he added.

"Well, he can't be moved at present, sir, anyway."

"Mr. Rodwell"—Rosita came into the room, carrying an empty cup and saucer—"Hugh has just had his milk and says he wants to speak to you. I think I wouldn't stay too long if I were you."

Godfrey looked admiringly at his wife: in his opinion she was behaving perfectly. She took her share of the nursing without the least fuss, deferred to the trained sister in the prettiest fashion, and remained so commendably cheerful all the while, that she might almost have been enjoying herself.

Indeed, if Miles had not been so grateful to her for not blaming him for having failed to look after his young charge more adequately, *he* would have said that Rosita *was* enjoying herself. Which indeed was not very far from the truth. The opportunity to make herself essential was too good to resist: for once Rosita could really play the part of mother: if the others ignored her readiness to help them, at least Hugh was different.

"He's *distinctly* better," she said as Miles left the room.

"Thanks to you."

"Nonsense. I've merely carried out orders."

"You're wonderful," said Godfrey with conviction, "and to think I nearly sent the poor little fellow to school."

"It was with the best intentions, darling."

"But you were so much wiser!"

Rosita sighed rapturously. This was indeed ample reward for all her trouble. Benedict had made her look small and

Marina had caused her to feel inadequate: even Aldous, who *had* given up those lamentable hens, had not done it for her sake. But Hugh was her success.

"It's simply a matter of intuition," she said.

Godfrey kissed her tenderly. "It's a comfort to know," he said, "that the little chap is as grateful to you as I am. School would probably have killed him."

Meanwhile the invalid, propped up on many pillows, was inviting Miles to take a chair by the bed. Even illness could not entirely subdue Hugh's impish precocity, and he began at once: "I'm not supposed to talk, and as I've got something I particularly want to say I'll cut the cackle and come to the 'osses. *Much* though I appreciate your well-meant efforts in connection with my education . . ."

"You can cut that, too," said Miles. He straddled the chair and laughed encouragingly at his pupil.

"Well, so long as you take it for granted. The fact is I—I want to go to school."

"Very laudable of you. I think the idea's excellent."

Hugh's sallow little face flushed. "I could get a scholarship?"

"On your head."

"Then the ground's cut below Father's feet. He can't plead poverty. Are you—are you surprised, sir?"

"Not very, old man."

"It's a pity about the river."

"You needn't go to a rowing school."

"I had thoughts," said Hugh cheekily, "of emulating you."

"Very kind," declared Miles, but he knew below the surface lurked deep, damaging disappointment, and he added: "If I were you I wouldn't hurry anything. Settle into the general life of the school first: you'll find out what you want to do—and what you're fit for—as time goes on."

"A fellow who can't play games simply isn't in the picture," muttered Hugh.

"I disagree: personality can triumph over everything. And the average public-school boy is as decent a fellow as yourself. Don't forget that. Your notion of lusty barbarians is simply obsolete. A fellow who is amusing and good-tempered is always liked."

"I hope so."

"You'll probably be contributing to the School Magazine before your first term's out. That'll be good practice for you. And when your first novel's published I shall say: 'Ah! I taught him English grammar.'" And he got up to go: he was alarmed at the expression on Hugh's face and wished to save him the humiliation of bursting into tears. But the other achieved a watery smile.

"It's all right," he said, "I'm not going to weep. Thought of my revered stepmother's face, when I reveal my intention to her, sustains me admirably. By the way, sir . . ."

"Well? Incidentally, I think you've talked enough."

"What about Marina if you get another job?"

"You have a nice sleep."

"Invalids mustn't be thwarted. *I've* seen young love budding all these months: my advice to you is to let it blossom."

"You keep your advice to yourself," retorted Miles as, scarlet to the ears, he left the room. Nor was he made any more comfortable by the fact that he had in his pocket a letter from Marina of which he could not make head nor tail. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MILES,

"It was very magnanimous of you to write to me. Our show is going well: I have learnt to keep the music out of my singing and to dance against the time. It is quite an education. The whole revue is simply too intelligent for anything. All the same I beg you not to come and see it.

A friendly face might ruin the beautiful vacuity of my performance.

"I live in a hostel where the best Victorian atmosphere pervades: I am sure you would approve. Benedict nobly takes me for a walk every Sunday afternoon: and every Sunday evening I am divided between a violent longing for something to do and a thankfulness that I haven't got to go to that damned theatre.

"Mr. Temple came up one day and took me out to dinner: he has not repeated this shattering piece of patronage.

"Write again if you've got time.

"Yours, .

"MARINA."

Now what exactly did that amount to—much or little? He could not decide. But it was obvious she was not happy. Was her childish sarcasm relating to Wynnington Temple a hint to him that she had overcome her infatuation? Again, he was unable to tell. 'What I should like to do,' he thought, 'is to go and spend a Sunday with her.' And, having arrived at that conclusion, he discovered that he was no longer ashamed to admit to himself how much her welfare concerned him. She mattered: in fact she mattered so much that he had a longing to tell her flatly that she had got to stop being unhappy and try getting married to him instead. 'Of course,' he reflected, but without undue gloom, 'an assistant master can't normally afford a wife, but—but dash it all, love's not a normal state. So it's the greatest mistake in the world to start arguing logically about it.' Having arrived at this comfortable conclusion, he next wondered what Godfrey and Rosita would have to say to the idea. He supposed that they would probably object, and was somewhat stimulated by the idea. It was nice to think that he might have to strike a few attitudes and fight for his lady. Miles felt in good battle trim: and his pugnacious attitude

included a longing to punch Wynnington Temple's beautiful nose, several times and very hard.

"I don't really see," he told himself restlessly, "why I need wait. I won't answer Marina's letter, I'll go up to London next week-end."

Rosita, blissfully unaware of the several plans hatching under her roof, went in to say good night to Hugh in her best and most soothing manner. She found him wide awake and keeping his nurse in fits of flattering laughter.

"Observe my appreciative audience!" he said. "Nurse, oblige me by retiring discreetly while I say good night to our alluring Rosita."

"You're a character, that's what you are," said the nurse comfortably, and she went out carrying a vase of flowers.

"Marvellous, isn't it?" croaked Hugh. "She never goes empty-handed: I call her Carter Paterson. It's the kind of joke she enjoys. I like these fat and cosy women. She'd make the ideal school matron."

"Darling, you've talked enough."

"Perhaps, but I've not said anything. Rosita, how far does your softening influence still operate with my revered parent?"

"What *do* you mean, old man?"

"Merely that you must break it to him that this tutor business is a mistake. Mr. Rodwell's one of the best and he's taught me a lot; more than anything else, incidentally, that I'll be bored to pieces unless I can have the stimulus of competition: which sounds like a book but is completely true. Besides, I want to go to school: I always have, in a queer sort of way: it's hard to explain: I was terrified and fascinated: but Mr. Rodwell's shown me there's no need for either extreme, and Cherry's taught me the rest. So that's settled. Tell Father I'll get a scholarship." And he began to cough.

Rosita rearranged his blankets for him: her hands

trembled a little: of course, Hugh was still ill and had to be treated with extreme gentleness, but this blow was so sudden as to rob her, at least temporarily, of all show of tact. "I confess," she began, "that I don't understand. You implored me to intervene for you . . . but it's too late to discuss it to-night. You must go to sleep. We'll talk to-morrow."

He shook his head. "If necessary I'll see Father myself. At once, I mean. I want to make it quite clear before I settle down."

"Very well," said Rosita coldly and stalked out of the room. She went at once to Godfrey. "Hugh wishes to speak to you," she said. "I warn you you'll find him in a particularly exasperating mood." Gone were her good intentions never to criticise or blame his children in her husband's hearing. She was too angry and disappointed to remember the necessity for considering anyone's feelings.

"I daresay his temperature is up, poor fellow," replied Godfrey, looking at her reproachfully.

Mounting the stairs to his son's room, he presently encountered the nurse. "How is he this evening?"

"Oh *much* better, Mr. Daleham. And full of spirits. Are you going in to say good night? I know he's anxious to see you."

"Well, old man," began Godfrey, going into the bedroom with an acute feeling of awkwardness. Always his children embarrassed him, but never more so than when they were ill. "How are you feeling?"

"Rather remorseful for having frightened Rosita."

Godfrey sat down on the edge of the bed. "Why, what did you say to her?"

"I expressed a commendable attitude of filial piety," said Hugh.

"That," returned his father mildly, "was enough to startle anyone."

"I agree." His grin was more impish than ever. "Actually, however, the mood isn't as unlikely as it sounds. It all boils down to this: I want to do something you want me to do."

"And that is?"

"Go to school. I'll be strong enough soon. I've wanted it for ages, Father, only—I completely funk'd things. Mr. Rodwell's helped me no end, and so did Aldous' girl, Cherry. Don't be fed up with me . . ."

Godfrey patted him with extreme embarrassment. "My dear fellow! I'm delighted. Only a fool never changes his mind. When you're well again, we'll discuss it fully."

"Consider it settled now," said Hugh sleepily, "school on the coast—scholarship—chest expansion—distinguished member of the Sixth—I've got it all pat. O.K.?"

"Yes," said Godfrey simply. "Quite O.K."

"Good," said his son and snuggled down among the blankets.

His father waited, and receiving no more information tiptoed creakily out of the room. He was touched and pleased at Hugh's decision. He felt as near to his youngest son as he had done to Marina when she had perched on the arm of his chair and coaxed him into compliance with her schemes. Altogether things were going well for him at last. Aldous had taken a wise step and thrown in his lot with the artistic world: it was likely the young man would make a name for himself. Even Benedict, impenitent in his choice, had surely justified it and was most happily employed.

In a mood therefore of serenity and relief Godfrey rejoined Rosita in the drawing-room.

"Well," she said at once, her cheeks still flushed, her eyes still indignant, "what do you think of it? I hope you persuaded him of the absurdity of striking attitudes, even if he *is* ill."

Godfrey looked surprised. "On the contrary," he replied,

"I consider the idea is excellent. I have always thought school would be good for him."

"But—but good gracious!" exclaimed Rosita. "You said only just now how grateful you were to me . . ."

"I am always grateful to you," interrupted Godfrey, also on a rising note, "but naturally I take into account what the children desire themselves, and experience has taught me that they are almost invariably sensible in the choice they make."

"You can't really believe that, Godfrey."

"But I do. And I see, as well, how very adequately they get on without our interference."

Rosita's flush deepened. "I have *never* interfered."

"For my part, I can't say as much. I certainly sought to influence them, but undoubtedly I was mistaken."

"I suppose you think I oughtn't to have espoused Hugh's cause in the first place, although you thanked me for it just now."

"I think," said Godfrey meekly, "that perhaps it would have been almost better to have allowed events to shape themselves. Here's Rodwell: let's ask him." And turning to the tutor he added: "Do you know of this decision of Hugh's?"

"I've known it for some time, sir, but I didn't want to say anything until Hugh himself was ready. I don't think you need have any anxiety on the score of his health: it'll be the making of him. And I firmly believe he'll be happy. His sense of humour is bound to see him through, and he's certain to make a good many friends. Other boys love being made to laugh by impudent contemporaries."

"I," said Rosita loudly, "appear to be in a minority. I do *not* agree with this sudden whim. I don't think it ought on any account to be encouraged. If he's sent to school he'll only want to come home again before the term's over."

"I doubt it," said Godfrey.

"With all due respect, so do I," agreed Miles. "And, honestly, Mr. Daleham, it's no sudden caprice on Hugh's part. The idea's been dogging him ever since I've known him. It's been a sort of psychological problem: he was at once fascinated and repelled: so far as I could I've helped him, not by agreeing with him that he wasn't fit for school life, and encouraging him in self-pity, but in taking exactly the opposite attitude. To the best of my ability I've tried to describe the attractions and suggest that he'd enjoy them."

"For which," remarked Godfrey, "we owe you a deep debt of gratitude."

Rosita gazed at the pair in dismay. They seemed allied against her. One after the other the children had eluded her; even Hugh, on whom her faith had been pinned. But worse had followed: here not only was Miles riding away from Marina, but Godfrey riding from herself.

"One can't help wondering," she began, "if either of you quite appreciates the situation. I don't want to exaggerate my own understanding, but I'm bound to suggest that feminine intuition *does* play *some* part and I do feel that I understand Hugh's delicate mechanism very completely. I was an acutely sensitive child myself . . ."

"Yes, darling," said Godfrey with a fatal attempt at placation, "but you'll remember that you have always told me how little attention was paid to your sensitiveness, and I'm sure Rodwell will agree with me when I say that the result is both charming and happy."

"*Certainly*," said Miles obediently. "*Most* charming."

Poor Rosita was so annoyed with them as to be near to tears. "You are *quite* wrong: I suffered agonies: indeed, I *still* suffer from that early lack of understanding. And I am all the more anxious that Hugh should not have to endure what I have."

"He won't," said Godfrey, a trifle drily. "Hugh at thirteen is a hard-boiled intellectual."

Miles nodded. "A good deal of his so-called sensitiveness is surface emotionalism. He's growing out of it rapidly. I assure you, Mrs. Daleham, you've really got nothing to worry about so far as that's concerned."

Rosita rose from the sofa. "Well," she said unsteadily, "as there seems to be a sort of conspiracy against any advice which I may happen to offer, there's not much point in prolonging the discussion." And she left the room.

"Dear me," said Godfrey helplessly, "don't say I've hurt my wife's feelings."

Miles refrained. The fact was so obvious that he hardly liked to stress it. Instead he ventured: "Would you mind, sir, if I went up to London for the day next Sunday?"

"Not in the least. Not in the least, my dear fellow." Mr. Daleham's thoughts were obviously still with Rosita. "Take the week-end if you like."

"I only want the day, sir, thank you."

Godfrey glanced at him, and with difficulty tried to give the young man some attention. "I suppose this means you'll be looking out for a new job."

"Well sir, I hope to try and get my old school to take me on for that assistant mastership. Actually I've been promised the job next year, but I expect they could be prevailed upon to take me sooner. It's a question of vacancies, of course, but the Head's always been very good to me, he might give me special consideration."

"I don't see why you need hurry the thing," remarked Godfrey, "you've got nothing to hurry for."

Once more Miles disagreed with him. The matter, however, was not debated, for Mr. Daleham went off in search of his wife. He found her in their bedroom, applying powder to a suspiciously flushed face.

"My dear," said Godfrey in extreme confusion, "I came up to say I hope I wasn't irritable."

"Not in the least," replied Rosita coldly. "It was stupid of

me to interfere. I quite see that it's not my business."

This was most difficult. "Oh, but surely," he protested, "it's no question of that. Besides," he added, in his anxiety floundering yet more deeply, "we all make mistakes." Receiving no reply at all to this well-meant consolation, he seized a clothes-whisk and began feverishly to brush his suit. "Hugh has been helped by outside influence," he went on. "He said as much himself. Mr. Rodwell, of course, in particular, and then young Cherry . . ."

"Young who?"

"Dear me!" sighed the unfortunate Godfrey, laying down the whisk in despair. "Aldous particularly asked me not to speak of it when he wrote, and Hugh mentioning the girl this evening quite put the need for caution out of my head."

"If they're so anxious to keep something from me obviously you'd better not say any more. I didn't know they wrote you private letters."

"Not *letters*, dear. Just this one from Aldous. However, I seem to have let the cat out of the bag, so I'd better go on. It seems Aldous has fallen in love with Greenway's niece."

Rosita was too surprised to remember that she was also bitterly wounded. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "but that's serious."

"I imagine so."

"I mean, he'll want to marry her."

"It does seem the most likely conclusion."

"But, Godfrey, is she a *lady*? I mean, her uncle, and then those hens . . .!"

"Well, dear, her father made a name for himself. I don't know if that's desirable. It seems the girl's got character: she appears to have had some influence on Hugh."

"Really!" Rosita's deepened colour returned. "Well, of course, these matters are for you to decide. Please don't imagine for a moment that I want to butt in. I

entirely see that it's quite outside my province."

"On the contrary, dearest . . ."

"No, no. I'm quite clear on that point. Nothing would *induce* me to interfere in any way."

"But, Rosita . . ."

"*Please*, Godfrey . . .!"

He stood still, quite appalled. They had fallen out! What a calamity! He perceived also that she was about to cry. His immediate impulse was to go away at once. But on second thoughts he stood his ground. This was the sort of happening a family man had to put up with. Doubtless the thing to do was to turn the conversation. And, taking her encouragingly in his arms, he felt himself inspired.

"Tell me," he said, "what you want for your birthday: perhaps you would like to redecorate the drawing-room?"

19

BENEDICT, facing Aldous across the breakfast table, was quite unable to hide his elation. His mail that morning had been unbelievably exciting. Not only had he received a copy of a high-brow monthly journal containing a poem by himself, not only had the staggering sum of three guineas been sent to him in payment for his verses, but also upon the table, crushed from much reading, lay the editor's letter bidding him to an interview at midday.

"I wonder if he wants me on the staff?" mused Benedict. Aldous did not think it very likely, but he hardly cared to say so. Cordially he agreed with his brother that the event was extremely startling. After which he sat squarely in his chair, eating his bacon and eggs, and staring out of the window at the grey London street.

He did not think much of the pension in which they were living, nor of this rather airless dining-room, with its long

table littered with the soiled plates, and empty coffee-cups, of the other young men who had already left for the publisher's office and the librarian's stool.

Soon he would be limping off to his art class himself, and in the afternoon he would have to go out to Kew with his paints, and set about fulfilling his latest commission. He would be tired to death when he came in, and to-morrow would be just such another day, but at the end of the week there would be his usual meeting with Cherry, and the long talk on the green chairs in front of the Round Pond.

"*You*," said Benedict, "are a full-fledged artist and everyone who's seen your work, from X downwards, believes in it. I'm, I admit, at the beginning. But this, you'll agree, looks more than hopeful."

"It does indeed," said Aldous. "Incidentally, I'm no more fully fledged than you, but let that pass. How about your interview, can you manage it?"

"Can I manage it?" repeated Benedict scornfully. "D'you think I'd let a chance in a million slip through my fingers?"

"I only meant that I wondered if you were likely to be on a job at that time."

"The *Daily Echo*," said Benedict grandly, "is not so important as all that."

"Don't forget it's a popular paper and you're in luck to get work on it. The other may sound alluring, but I doubt if it can offer you a means of livelihood."

"That is not one of the considerations which is likely to weigh with me." Benedict was on his high horse.

"Well," said Aldous obstinately, "someone's got to pay your keep here, and I can't. I've only just got enough for myself."

"There's always Father. I mean at a pinch. One needn't starve."

"Now that Hugh's going to school he may find himself a bit pushed for spare cash." Aldous was feeling sorry

for Godfrey, and a trifle annoyed at Benedict's callousness.

"Rubbish. He managed to keep me at Oxford, didn't he? And he still wants me to go back. In common with many academic persons, dear old Father has a one-track mind. However, this latest piece of luck may go some way to convincing him of the folly of his opinions."

Aldous wiped his mouth and got up. "I must go. Might I suggest that you'll be late yourself if you don't hurry?"

"You can suggest anything you like to me this morning," said Benedict easily. "I'm in the best of all possible moods."

An hour or so later, and still in a condition of excessive confidence, he was on the top of a bus travelling to Bond Street to report on one of the latest smash-and-grab raids. His job did not take him long, and it presently occurred to him that, if he wished to keep his appointment, he had better take pains not to be sent out on any mission likely to involve him in unfortunate delay. A minor road accident luckily engaged his attention, and, making for the nearest telephone box, he telephoned the first story, and explained that he was out on the second. After which he emerged with a relatively clear conscience, took a few perfunctory notes, while two motorists slanged each other over the head of an imperturbable policeman, and finally pocketed his book and marched off in the direction of Covent Garden.

The April morning was cool and showery, but to Benedict it seemed as if sunshine shone in every street. He was glad that he had not had his hair cut for some time; long hair was proper in a poet: he would have to discard his too respectable hat, and take to wearing shabbier clothes again. He had enjoyed his short experience of journalism, but only as a prelude to something more closely approximating to his pet ambition.

'Poetry,' he murmured. 'Poor old Aldous, he simply doesn't understand what one means by the artistic urge.'

It did not occur to Benedict that 'poor old Aldous,' who

was not given to naming names, was all the more artist because of this fact. It did not even occur to him that his elder brother was an artist in spite of himself, rather than in answer to any conscious impetus.

But it was all the other way about with Benedict. Yet he was none the less sincere, and his ridiculous attitudes were only a very small part of the reality of his love for his craft.

He arrived at the door of his destination half an hour too soon, and was obliged to go for a further walk round the opera house and the market before he could decently present himself. Even so he was ten minutes before his time, and was shown into a small ante-room, containing one chair and a single shelf of books, and there left to support his growing nervousness as best he could. Not that he was in any real alarm as to the purport of this interview. Obviously he was going to be offered something, and probably something good.

Feverishly he paced up and down the little room: now and then he wondered how they were taking his absence in his own office. But the business at hand was of more immediate concern. What sort of job was he likely to be offered? To review current verse? That would undoubtedly suit him down to the ground. He would, of course, contribute regularly himself. As one of the staff . . .

"Will you come this way, please?"

He followed the girl clerk up a flight of narrow stairs. She opened a door, and stood aside to let him enter. He walked in, and found himself confronted by a very broad, very red, and very genial person, who shook his hand warmly and told him to sit down. Anyone less like the current impression of the editor of a high-brow journal Benedict could not imagine. The man looked like a jovial stockbroker.

"Well, Daleham," he said, "I liked that set of verses. They were good."

"I'm very glad, sir."

"Written anything since?"

"Yes, sir, a certain amount."

"And how d'you like journalism?"

"It's amusing in a way. One sees life."

The editor's eyes twinkled. "Does one? Well, that's all very helpful. Why d'you keep on dragging politics into your poetry?"

Benedict looked shocked. "I don't see how one can divorce them, sir."

"You don't? How old are you, Daleham?"

"Almost twenty."

"And what's this story about your having run away from Oxford?"

"It's quite true," said Benedict, with pride.

"Then my advice to you is to run back again. You're young and you're half-educated. Your stuff's clever enough, but unless you're careful that's where you're going to stick. I've seen too many young men finished at thirty. It occurred to me that in your case the apparently inevitable might, with care, be averted. There's a note in your stuff that I like. Briefly, I'd call it idealism. You're free of all this erotic nonsense, and that in itself is refreshing. But, as I say, you want educating. Go back to college, young man. They'll have you all right. What have you missed? Not more than a couple of terms? Eat humble pie, then, make your apologies, and start working for a degree. Then come back here and see me." He got up and held out his hand. The interview was obviously over.

Benedict, pale with disappointment, looked at him miserably. "D'you mean, sir, that I'm no good as I am?"

"For too short a time: clever children, who prolong their precocity, make, as I say, thundering bores." He smiled at Benedict's downcast face. "To despise the chances of a first-rate education is the action of a mug," he said, "and

you don't strike me as being at all a fool. I know you love poetry, I think you're going to write it, but, like the rest of us, you must learn discipline first. Go to it—and don't forget to come and see me three years hence."

Walking through the market towards the Tube Station, Benedict wondered what all the elation of the morning was about. He had been offered no job, it had not even been suggested that he should submit further work. He was to go back to the beginning: he had to start again.

Meanwhile, he had to square accounts with the *Daily Echo*. And that was not so easy. Immediately on his return he was sent for by the sub-editor and asked to explain himself. Benedict gave rather a lame account of his behaviour. After the road accident, he explained, he was obliged to attend to some urgent business of his own.

"Our reporters have no urgent business of their own," said the sub-editor, icily. "You're sacked."

Benedict was not surprised. Being, however, a young man who did not believe in letting indignity affect him unduly, he returned to the pension, packed his suitcase, left a note for Aldous, and took the first train home.

He found his father, with Mrs. Wynnington Temple, walking in the orchard examining the fruit trees.

Godfrey greeted his son calmly, but without enthusiasm: he supposed that Benedict had lost his job and was come home in order to enjoy paternal support, which was, needless to say, a trifle annoying. But he was not pleased when Mrs. Wynnington Temple, looking the prodigal up and down, remarked cantankerously:

"Well, young man, and what does this sudden appearance mean? Are you on your beam ends? That's what usually happens to boys of your sort. Not content with throwing away your best chances, you must needs make a hash of your so-called independence. For my part I'm tired of you. Your

parents have far too much patience. Don't you expect any sympathy from me."

"It is nice to know who are one's friends," said Benedict politely.

Godfrey took his arm. "For my part," he said, "I always feel flattered when my children bring their troubles to me."

"Sentimentalism," snorted Mrs. Wynnnington Temple.

"No," said Mr. Daleham gently, "sentiment."

"Have it your own way," replied the lady. "I don't pretend to be clever. Maybe 'sloppy' was the word I should have used. Anyhow, it seems a great pity to me that you should ruin your children by self-indulgence."

"Or," suggested Benedict blandly, "that we should ruin our father by filial approval?"

Godfrey squeezed his arm. "The young learn by making their own mistakes, and show the utmost courage sometimes by admitting them. This generation knocks spots off yours and mine, Mrs. Temple."

"Not it." She was indignant. "Well, of course, you're different, but I, anyhow, had a tough time of it, and I can assure you it was no good my coming along and whining to *my* father. He had other things to think of, and I had to get on as best I could. And that's been my maxim all through life. Putting up with things if I couldn't alter them. Being married to a famous man hasn't caused me to alter my point of view, either."

It was perhaps inevitable that Mr. Daleham and Benedict should immediately have thought of Marina, and they looked at the little, dauntless, weather-beaten woman with less hostility than before.

"One can acknowledge another person's courage, I hope," began Godfrey, "without denying it when it is manifested in a different form in someone else." It sounded pedagogic, but it was the best he could do.

"Hum," said Mrs. Temple, "soft sawder. I don't change

my opinion. And I daresay you won't change yours either. These damson trees of yours aren't going to yield much fruit this year. The late frosts have done a terrible lot of damage. What are you doing about your sweet peas?"

Disengaging his arm, Benedict gave Godfrey a sympathetic wink and set off in search of Rosita. He discovered his stepmother on a pair of steps in a dismantled drawing-room.

"Hullo, what's this?" he enquired. "Spring-cleaning?"

"Good gracious," said Rosita, and sat down upon the top rung to stare at him. "What *are* you doing at home?"

"I've lost my job."

"Oh dear," she said helplessly, "how *most* unfortunate. Is your Father very angry?"

"On the contrary. Do tell me what you are doing to the room, Rosita?"

She laughed: she looked pretty, sitting up there with a tousled grey head and flushed pink cheeks. "I'm redecorating the room; these new chintz curtains are a present from your father, and so are the chair-covers. The Worcester china is mine, and I went into Redbury to buy the cushions. Those two water-colours and the Axminster carpet we got at a local sale."

"By the time you're finished," said Benedict, "it will look like anybody's room. Scene I: the drawing-room of Mr. Smith's country house in Berkshire."

"Exactly," said Rosita happily. "That's just what I want it to look like. It's ridiculous to sit in an Oriental-cum-South American setting, looking out on English cows sheltering from the rain. But do tell me more about yourself, Benedict."

"All in good time. You appear in fine fettle, Rosita. What's up? Why did Father give you this grand present?"

She chuckled again. "Well, truth to tell, my dear, we

fell out about Hugh. I was against this school project, and I was worsted."

Benedict's eyes danced. "You don't mean to tell me you had words?"

"Not quite," she admitted, "but the atmosphere was a little strained."

"Did you relieve it with tears?"

"Never you mind," advised Rosita archly; "you admire the chair-covers instead."

"I can't: I think they're frightful. Cabbage roses, forsooth! Poor Father, what a time we all give him!"

Her smile faded. "Godfrey? Of course, I consulted him about the room."

"Of course, nothing," retorted Benedict. "Father doesn't care two hoots for atmosphere. All he asks for is a quiet life. Which none of us gives him. Not even you, Rosita. Poor Father."

"And why am I specially to be pitied?" enquired Godfrey, coming into the room. He looked small and shabby, and his gardening coat had a button missing. His kind face, with its benevolent forehead, wore an expression of mild curiosity.

"Because of your excellence," said Benedict promptly.

But Rosita said nothing: she sat on the top of the steps, slowly peeling off her dusting gloves and looking at her husband as if she had never truly seen him before.

"Mrs. Temple seems in some doubt of my excellence," returned Godfrey, smiling. "I like that woman, in spite of her sharp tongue. And I'm sorry for her. Well, old man, let's hear your story." And he sat down on the stripped sofa beside the pile of new chintz.

Benedict hesitated a moment. "I'll tell you," he said slowly, "and when I've told you I want you to reserve judgment for a moment until I've added something else." He looked about for something to sit on, dragged forward a

footstool and began his story. Certainly it sounded a lame enough affair as he told it, and he finished with a sense of extreme inadequacy. "So," he went on, "I came home, according to Mrs. Temple, with my tail between my legs. But it's not quite like that really. I haven't done what I set out to do. But I'm on the road to it. This chap said: 'Come back in three years' time, and with a degree.' If I'd never gone to London that couldn't have happened. Therefore I think I'm justified in what I did."

"That's a point of view, anyhow," began Godfrey, but Rosita interrupted him.

"I don't suppose the Oxford authorities will take you back," she said. "And, anyhow, it's extremely hard on your father."

Mr. Daleham looked surprised: he stared up at the steps and observed that his wife was both angry and tremulous. He wondered what Benedict had said to upset her.

"Well," he said, "I don't know about that. I shall have to write to the Provost, of course. But it's more than a college affair; the final decision, I take it, rests with the University authorities." Then he paused, and his whimsical expression became more pronounced. Whenever Godfrey found a situation a little much for him, he invariably arranged his features to meet the occasion. "However," he said, "I have been in correspondence with them already. It occurred to me, as a likely possibility, that something of this sort might happen. I don't think, to be quite candid, that there will be much difficulty about your going back, Benedict."

Rosita began to climb down the steps. She was not interested in listening to her stepson's carefully casual thanks.

"You've chosen an unfortunate time to come back," she said. "The new cook's leaving."

Benedict, left alone with his father, asked, with an unusual solicitude, if he would be much in the way.

"Of course not," returned Godfrey, almost irritably. "Don't be absurd. Tell me, how will Aldous get on without you?"

"Aldous? He's all right. He's doing first-rate work, buoyed up by the indefatigable Cherry."

"I should like to meet that young woman. She seems to have character."

"She has," said Benedict with distaste. "If any woman tried to run me like that I should wring her neck. But Aldous loves it."

"And Marina? What news of her?"

"Well, she's still in the show, and she just manages not to wreck it."

"How's that? I thought she had some talent."

"She has. There's the rub. She gives one the impression that, offered half an opportunity, she'd really open her mouth and sing. Also, that she'd suddenly get a move on and dance. But you know what these modern shows are . . ."

"I don't, thank heaven."

"Well, you're gaga if you go all musical comedy. The greater part of it's epigrammatic and the rest is mathematical."

"Do they play to empty houses?"

"On the contrary."

"Then I fear I do *not* understand this age," sighed Godfrey. "By the by, d'you think Mrs. Temple meant any allusion to her husband when she spoke of Marina just now?"

"I expect so."

Mr. Daleham looked worried. "I thought all that was over. D'you know if they meet?"

"I know she's dined with him once. But she doesn't talk about him half as much as she did. Altogether, she's a good deal less conversational than she used to be."

"Dear me," said Godfrey, still more concerned, "I don't think that's a very good sign."

Benedict yawned. "Perhaps there's someone else on the *tapis*." Marina's flirtations did not interest him particularly. "Look here," he went on, "shall I go up and sit with Hugh for a bit while you get that letter written?"

"What letter?" demanded Godfrey absently.

His son looked at him in alarm. "To the powers that be," he said. "After all, Father, Trinity term's begun and—and I want to start those three years as soon as possible."

"I've no doubt you do." Mr. Daleham looked round the room. "Well, there's no post until to-morrow, anyhow. What do you think of the new decorations? I don't notice a great deal of difference myself. I'm sorry Rosita seems upset again. It has been rather a trying winter."

"How's the book, Father?"

"It's progressing," returned Godfrey meekly. "It's getting on. But there's no hurry for it, you know. None at all."

Benedict believed him. If things were left to his father they would never move, or so slowly as to be almost imperceptible. In an age remarkable for its rapidity this seemed a pity. All the same, he was enormously grateful to Godfrey, and he supposed that he ought to say something about it.

"You needn't worry about my not working this time," he said; "it will be so very much in my own interest." He wondered if that would make good, and had an uncomfortable feeling that he might have put it better.

But Godfrey seemed quite satisfied, and Benedict came to the conclusion that the episode might now fairly be considered closed.

He would go back and he would take the first steps towards becoming a poet: and this time there would be no pamphlets in the dons' letter-boxes.

"Why didn't you come up yesterday?" enquired Marina. "You could have stayed at Benedict's pension and seen my show."

"You asked me not to," said Miles. "Didn't you mean what you said?"

They were walking in Kensington Gardens. There was a scent of spring rain, the hawthorn was in bud and the laburnum broken into leaf. The sun shone on the strolling, contented crowd of Sunday-clad workers.

"Yes," admitted Marina, "I am glad you haven't seen it. You would only be bored, and I embarrassed."

"No," he returned, "I shouldn't be bored. You can do a great many things to me, Marina, but you can't bore me."

She glanced at him and said nothing. He looked much as usual, carrying his hat in his hand and his red head in the air. She had perhaps forgotten how unguarded and changeful his expression was, or had she merely grown accustomed to the theatre's painted faces?

"You know, of course," he went on, "that Hugh's going to school in September. I shall be very sorry to say good-bye to you all."

Marina looked startled. "You needn't drop us," she suggested.

It was Miles's turn to be silent. Strolling down the Broad Walk he asked if she missed Benedict.

"This is the first Sunday without him," she said, "and you're a very agreeable substitute."

"Thank you," retorted Miles, not looking particularly flattered.

"But *I shall* miss him," she continued. "Aldous is wrapped up in his girl, and although they are both very kind it's hardly likely that I should enjoy playing gooseberry."

"I suppose you've made new friends?"

"Do you? Well, I haven't. But," she added with an irresistible little gleam of malice, "I've kept an old one. Mr. Wynnington Temple's in London again."

Miles raised his eyebrows. "I heard that he was going to America. I'm not surprised he's succumbed to the lure of Hollywood. A really romantic picture, all sword and cloak and swaying coaches should suit him."

"Why?" asked Marina coldly.

"He'll be able to do the caged-tiger prowling all over the screen, and use up the whole range of those remarkable gestures. He'd be advised perhaps to avoid a duel, otherwise I pity his adversary; the poor fellow will have some difficulty in not pricking that all too protuberant waistcoat." He knew that this was the last way in the world to succeed with Marina, but he could not help himself. Whenever he thought of Wynnington Temple he felt unbearably irritated. He wished that he could do something violent and spectacular about it.

A sense of humour had never disturbed Miles's dignity. He thought his state of mind extremely commendable. Unfortunately Marina did not. In her turn she could not resist a desire to annoy the young man. His certainty and calm enraged her. He said things which were unforgivable. The maddening fact was that she knew they were true. And there was the rub. Her last experience of Wynnington Temple had opened her eyes to a good deal. And her recent association with the theatre had taught her how foolish and romantic her vague dreams had been. In truth, she did not know what she had wanted or expected: all that she did realise was that Wynnington Temple's easy assumption that sooner or later she would yield to him had killed her love. It was not only his certainty that wounded her: it was also the fact that by his unhurried demeanour she knew that it really did not matter one way or the other to him. She felt a fool, which was salutary. And, during the last

few weeks she had also felt extremely unhappy. She was frankly aware that she had made a bad mistake in coming to London at all. The stage was not for her. She had been blinded only by its fascination, and knew now that she had not got the spirit nor the will-power to endure its discipline.

It was an uncomfortable realisation, entailing the abandonment of all hope of becoming someone quite remarkably significant. Which seemed a pity. There were, of course, alternatives. There was even marriage. Privately she liked the notion of that. Hard work and very little money and the constant stimulant of effort—it was an exciting sort of programme. If she followed it she could feel superior to Rosita, who had married too late to undertake the true perils of marriage. They were for the young.

Marina had come to these conclusions as she lay awake in the hostel bedroom, depressed by her own inadequacy.

But when the morning had brought not counsel but Mr. Temple's invitation to dinner, she promptly forgot everything but the immediate sense of flattery. She was confused, therefore, by the arrival of Miles's note the same evening. It was certain he caused her little excitement. Yet the thought of seeing him afforded her a curious sense of security. He was a part of home, but better than that. He was a blend of the known and the unknown.

Often and often, after a particularly bitter and humiliating day at the theatre, she had thought of him, and the way he had nervously polished and repolished his spectacles that afternoon on the loggia when he had apologised to her, and afterwards they had so lamentably quarrelled.

But in spite of all this she found herself on the brink of quarrelling with him again. "Personally," she said, "I think it's uncommonly rude of you to run down my friends."

"Temple's no friend of yours," said Miles angrily, "and you know it. If you weren't young and attractive he

wouldn't take the slightest interest in you. It's only because you're fresh, and all the rest of it, that he can't leave you alone. D'you think he cares a hoot for your career, or your character, or anything of that sort? It's all eye-wash, Marina. And you know it. Why don't you give him the push?"

She longed to say that she agreed with him, that she would do anything he suggested. But somehow she felt that he was not helping her enough. She wanted him to tell her that it was he who really cared for her, he who would look after her. But he said nothing of the sort: he offered her nothing: he merely advised. And this, it seemed to Marina, was inadequate.

"I can take care of myself," she said. She hoped he would contradict her, but he merely led the way out of the Gardens, across to the Park, and Long Water, where the little green chairs were.

"Let's sit down," he said, "it's quite warm in the sun." And between them a silence fell: it was not comfortable and they knew that they were wasting time, but they were both self-conscious and both obstinate.

"What," he asked after a while, "shall you do when your present show comes to an end?"

Marina looked alarmed. "I don't know. I haven't thought. With Benedict away it will be awkward. I suppose I shall have to go the round of the agents like everyone else."

"You'd do better to go home," muttered Miles.

It was the counsel she wanted, but his method of offering it was not entirely happy. "Oh well," she said with an attempt at airiness, "the show may last some time yet."

"D'you really like it, Marina?"

His voice reminded her of how kind he could be if he put his mind to it. And she was touched. "No," she said slowly, "no, I don't like it at all. It's not a bit what I expected. I thought I'd dance about and sing, and wear lovely dresses, and have a splendid time. But I was wrong.

To me, it's all a rather dreary grind. The other girls are all right if you can get over their initial brilliance, but I know they think I'm a misfit. As for the men—they're painfully high-brow and terse and they all seem to suffer from anæmia. Incidentally, they don't seem to be much older than Benedict. Mr. Temple says that they're ruining the theatre."

"The theatre," remarked Miles, "be damned, so long as they don't ruin *you*. Besides, Temple's wrong. The theatre, like everything else, can do with fresh recruits and new ideas. But that's not to say you're out to be a part of the experiment. Finish your run if you must, and then pack up and go home, Marina."

It was what she most wanted to do, but his refusal to coax her, to plead his own cause, nettled her.

"I must talk it over," she said, "with Mr. Temple. How was Hugh when you left home? What a number of shocks our unfortunate parents have had lately!"

The afternoon passed in faint but mutual hostility: irritation existed between them and refused to depart. Only once, sitting over their late tea in a Bayswater café, did they come to anything like an understanding.

"What time's your dinner, Marina?"

"Seven-thirty, at 'The Wisteria'."

"You'll see all the swells, I suppose. If you hadn't been otherwise engaged, I should have asked you to a sketchy meal at Waterloo Station. But I'm glad I didn't risk it."

"I'd have loved it," she said quickly, "much better than—than seeing the swells. You know I would."

Miles dropped his hand on hers. "Then come with me instead. Please."

She shook her head. "I can't. I promised."

Perhaps if he had argued she would have given way, but he merely withdrew his hand, and called for the bill.

"I haven't got to dress, if—if you'd care to walk part of the way home with me," she said as they got outside,

"unless, of course, you've got to catch an early train back."

"There's no 'got to' about it," returned Miles, as though he resented the notion that he was subject to authority. "I can get back when I like."

"Don't miss the last bus for Redbury, otherwise you'll have to walk it."

"That's no hardship. I like a stroll at night."

"There's no accounting for tastes," and she giggled, almost as though she were happy again. For a moment it made her feel as if home were very near. And without warning her heart began to ache. She even felt a little afraid. He would be gone so soon: his place would be taken by Wynnington Temple: and all the old feeling of insecurity would come back.

"What time *shall* you be starting?" she enquired. "I'm only wondering because, when one's on one's own, it's rather nice to think that London's not entirely peopled by strangers."

"There's Aldous," suggested Miles, with a most unnecessary logic.

"He's not much good," said Marina, "for my purpose." To what she was referring she hardly knew. Only, in some dim way, she wished that she could have the comfortable feeling that somewhere Miles was hovering in the background.

"Well," he said, "I shan't be able to leave it too late. It would be annoying to miss the last train, and have to sleep on Waterloo platform."

His tone was a little cold. It occurred to Marina that he probably thought her unreasonable. She would not get out of her invitation, and yet she wanted to keep him dangling. Undoubtedly it *did* look like caprice. Yet none was intended.

"Oh no," she said quickly, "I didn't mean that you should

stay in London on my account. That's obviously absurd . . ."

"Is it?" he interrupted truculently. "Why?"

Really she hardly knew how to deal with him. "Because," she attempted, "I've no right to bother you. Besides, it's only a stupid sort of idea of mine. The—the feeling of being unnecessarily cut off, I mean."

"It's my belief," declared Miles, "you're afraid of Temple."

The idea had not occurred to her. But might it not be true? Were not the excitement he caused her, the fascination that still remained though deeper feeling was stilled, the sense of flattery and pride all caught up in a disturbed sensation whose root was a queer kind of fear?

"I don't know," she said despondently as they walked up the long empty street, "how I feel exactly."

Miles's impatience palpably deepened. "You must know," he said loudly, "if you care for him or not."

"You needn't bawl."

"I wasn't bawling; besides, there's no one to hear. There isn't a soul about. Sunday is a dreary deserted sort of day in London. I suppose if one lives here it's less noticeable. But to a visitor it's grim. The country's looking lovely just now. Surely you'd rather be in Berkshire?"

"Of course. But I've made my bed and I must lie on it." She did not really believe this, and was relieved that he at once contradicted her.

"Nonsense. In some cases that's a defeatist attitude. It's braver to admit oneself mistaken. And you've got plenty of courage, Marina. But you've not answered my question about Temple. That day on the loggia you talked bunk about love: do you believe it still?"

"I don't think," she said slowly, "that I know very much about love. I talked nonsense, I expect. But it was all rather difficult. So many people ran him down. At first I thought

Rosita was on my side, but soon I found her talking like all the rest. And it simply got my goat and made me all the more determined to believe in him." She was rather touched by her own loyalty as she spoke: it seemed to her pathetic and she glanced, with damp eyes, at Miles to see if he shared her opinion.

He did not, and proceeded to say so immediately. "Nonsense," he said roundly, "that's sheer pose. He flattered you, and you liked it and promptly fell for him. And now, I gather, you feel the other way about. Which does credit to your good sense. Personally I still have an ardent longing to kick him hard and very often: it's a pity he's an old man. Incidentally, does your taste always incline to the sere and yellow, Marina?"

It was disloyal to laugh, yet she could not help herself. She liked Miles's honest contempt, the hay he made of her sentimentalism, the hints he threw out as to his own condition.

"I'm not going to answer you," she said affably, "it's too bad. After all, I'm dining with him."

"Only through sheer obstinacy."

But nothing he could say would induce her to change her mind, and they presently parted at a street corner with the mutual feeling of having left everything unsaid.

The habit of under-statement was not, however, one of Wynnington Temple's peculiarities. Seated in his favourite corner of 'The Wisteria' he began to lecture Marina almost as soon as she arrived.

"You're five minutes late, young woman. If you want to remain a friend of mine you had better not attempt these capricious airs. And why are you dressing your hair in a chignon, and wearing that grotesque little Russian hat? If this is the result of your brief acquaintanceship with the theatre I must say I deplore it."

"I'm sorry," said Marina, a good deal crestfallen. "I had

a—a long walk this afternoon; that's why I am late. And I'm dressing my hair like this because they won't let me wear curls in our show. They say that the chocolate-box motif ruins everything. I assure you I don't like these things any better than you do, but 'needs must when the devil drives'."

"Resist the devil," advised Temple; "you're being spoilt altogether. You were a nice natural little thing once, but now you might be anybody."

"How I agree with you," said Marina. She was not feeling comfortable, but to submit to being bullied seemed unnecessary. She thought of Miles and smiled to herself. And Wynnington Temple saw her smile.

"What's the joke?" he asked suspiciously. "You're very independent all of a sudden. You wait until you're out of a job, my girl. Then you'll smile on the other side of your face."

It was only too likely, she thought. After all, Miles had gone away without saying anything really to help her, and the thought of confessing herself defeated and going home seemed to present itself in a very unattractive light without someone to champion her and take her part.

"Well, well," said Wynnington Temple, observing her downcast face, "it hasn't happened to you yet, so you needn't look so mouldy. I daresay I could put something in your way if you were very good. High-brow revue isn't your style at all. You ought to be in a really musical piece, and given a chance to show whether you can wear pretty clothes to advantage."

"Benedict said I'd never get an audition with any of the best managers," began Marina.

"Benedict," returned Wynnington Temple, "is perfectly correct as far as he goes. Without influence you wouldn't stand an earthly. But with influence, Marina, you'd have as much chance as any other alluring little girl."

She looked at him doubtfully. He had never seemed to her so tired and bored and deceptively kind. And immediately she wished with all her heart she had not come. She thought of Miles and his indignation with her, and their mutual tactlessness. But none of his foibles appeared to matter: they even, in a queer way, increased her regard for him. It was almost as if he were always trying to get the best out of her, even if his method was rather exasperating.

After all, he was young: they were both young: it was in the nature of things that they should quarrel and make it up again.

"You know I'm your friend," said Wynnington Temple. "I'll look after you. Come along back to the flat and we'll talk it all over."

"I don't think I'll do that."

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "All right. I'm not forcing you. I think you're a bit silly though, don't you?"

"Very likely," said Marina.

"After all, I'm going to the States, and dear knows when we'll meet again."

"Some time, I expect."

"That sounds very casual." He lit a cigar and looked amused. "I thought you adored me. I'm prepared to swear that you did up to a few weeks ago. Look at her blushing! I'm right, aren't I?"

She wondered if he knew how important the whole thing had seemed to her, and yet how delicate, how utterly unformed and incomplete.

"You're quite right about the show I'm in," she said: "I hate it. In fact I've decided that I don't like the stage at all."

At once his face changed: it lost the easy, handsome amusement and darkened. His mouth grew bitter and his eyes angry. For once in a way he was completely sincere: he

was defending something—perhaps the only thing—which he really loved. Although he decried its more modern manifestations, any slight to it as a whole infuriated him. He had a quite genuine contempt for the player who was easily discouraged or attempted airs of superiority.

"Like that, is it?" he said. "Giving up at the first fence. What in the name of reason did you expect?"

"More civility, for one thing. I know I had to be taught my job, but I'd rather be bawled at than treated to intellectual sarcasm. It's not only that, though. At a pinch I could have stood it if it had occurred to me as being even remotely worth while. But it didn't."

"*Didn't* it?" remarked Wynnington Temple. "That's sad." In anger he was not verbally inspired, and fell back on a somewhat lamentable form of repartee. "They scolded you, and you didn't like it, and you wanted to go home to Father. How extremely interesting! And what do you suppose happens to the girls with no father to run home to? Girls who go on tour, and have to put up with dam' bad lodgings, and give a show under rotten conditions, and get cursed by all and sundry for things which very likely aren't their fault at all. How d'you think they get on?"

"I don't know at all," said Marina. "Perhaps they have more spirit than I have."

"*Perhaps!*" He looked at her with extreme irritation. "So you're a quitter. I shouldn't have thought it."

"You told me yourself that you hated my show."

"Agreed. And I suggested a remedy. You needn't clear out of the theatre, or attempt to judge it by one extremely unimportant piece. You're not a fool, Marina. You've got talent; why the heck not use it? I've offered to help you, haven't I?"

She was surprised that he should repeat his offer. Could it mean that he *did* care for her, after all? The idea was alarming.

“Look at me.”

It was the last thing that she wanted to do, and, staring ahead, she saw in the centre of the room a young red-haired man dining alone. He wore country clothes and was several laps behind the other diners. No one seemed to be paying him the slightest attention.

And suddenly she wanted to laugh. With Miles in the room the whole thing took on an air of absurdity. All this was unreal and distinctly silly. It was simply so much talk. And she looked at Wynnington Temple with considerably less nervousness. “It’s frightfully kind of you to want to help me,” she said, “only I really do mean what I say. I’m going home to make pies, and starch linen collars. It’s far more in my line. I’m the prodigal daughter. In fact, the odd thing is, we’ve all come round to Father’s way of thinking after a short run for our money. It’s awfully interesting, really.”

“I disagree with you,” said Wynnington Temple, who had not yet noticed the young man sitting alone. He had let his cigar go out, and had allowed his public face to assume a most private character. For a famous actor Mr. Temple’s expression came perilously close to the sulky. “I think,” he went on, “that you’re a weak-kneed lot. You can’t stick to your own decisions. If you lacked background you’d be obliged to do it, but as things are, you can afford to run away from your mistakes and forget about them. Believe me, that isn’t education.”

“It’s good sense,” she assured him. “I know I was all agog to be an actress. Well, I’ve tried it . . .”

“I beg your pardon: I think not.”

“I had to take what I could get,” she defended, “and I soon found it didn’t suit me. But the whole life doesn’t suit me.”

“What d’you know about it, after a few weeks in London?”

She glanced at him, and looked beyond towards the red head at that unenviable table in the noisiest part of the restaurant. No, she could not very well tell the truth. It was too difficult: how was it possible to say that she had only been trying to cut a dash for love of a *matinée* hero, no more real than the painted figure on the drop-curtain? How could she say that all the febrile emotions of youth had been centred on him, and had been directed towards what appeared to be the easiest way of winning his regard? How could she explain that the whole thing had been a foolish unconnected dream, intangible and romantic?

He would never understand. Very properly he would think her intensely stupid. To her, the culmination of their friendship was only to be realised under the circumstances of her own remarkable performance at the first night of a fashionable comedy. She saw herself taking call after call, and, later, wearing gardenias and a startling frock, at a party with Royalty and Mr. Temple present. The first would compliment her on her beautiful playing: the second would kiss her wrist and indicate a genuine, though quite hopeless passion. Her rôle was to be gentle but adamant. And he would bow to her ruling. People would talk with lowered voices of the deep unfulfilled love of two great artists. Naturally she could not dream of marriage: as an actress she would go from strength to strength: as a woman carry a burden of unrelieved sorrow. It was all very, very interesting, and, although tragic, would not affect her looks. Except that men, first meeting her, would always say: "What is her history?" . . .

For a long time Marina had cherished this pretty dream. And it had come as a shock to her to discover that she dreamed alone. Mr. Temple's plans were more simple, more straightforward, and infinitely less romantic. At last she realised that not only was she quite unimportant to him, but that she had no chance of becoming anything else. He had

flattered her with an end in view, but even that end had small significance for him, and he was not going to exert himself to achieve it. And she sat still, wondering a little at herself for having mistaken the shadow for the substance. If it had not been for Miles's presence she might have felt afraid of the cheapness of things. She had sunk a good deal in her own estimation. She had thought herself extremely worth while, and Mr. Temple had shown her that she was no more than any other little bit.

But in spite of everything she did not agree with him: he might humiliate her and make her feel altogether ridiculous, but he could not change an obstinate sense of self-pride.

"You haven't answered my question."

"No," she admitted, "it's a bit difficult. If—if one loves an art for its own sake I suppose one can overcome every kind of difficulty, though my father says it's better to love it as a part of, or a contribution to, something larger."

"Since when have you started quoting your distinguished father?"

The faint note of derision in his voice made her grow red. "Whenever I remember how sensible he is."

"What a dutiful daughter. Well, continue your homily."

"I was only going to say that if one has any other motive which is less than devotion to one's art, it's pretty easy to go to bits. And I was—was only *keen* on the stage. Not more than that."

"And all," said Wynnington Temple easily, "for love of me. Don't look so nonplussed. It was patent and touching. But I don't quite see why you want to throw up the sponge. After all, I'm not going to the States for ever."

"Have you finished your book of reminiscences?"

"No," he said impatiently, "that can wait. Anyhow, what's it got to do with the present argument? I only toyed

with the idea while I was marking time . . . What's that Cheshire-cat grin for?"

"Only because you seem to give your own case away. You 'took up' writing because you were bored, just as I 'took up' the stage because—because you encouraged me."

"That's damned sauce, young woman, and you know it," Wynnington was looking more amiable. "I've dropped the book because publishers are incredible fools, and film producers are men of business. No fellow in his senses works at a thing that won't repay him. But to return to your own affairs. If you want to please me you'll stick to your choice. There's no reason at all why you shouldn't do quite nicely in time. I've already told you I'll look after you. I might put you in touch with an enterprising little repertory company if I were asked really prettily."

She shook her head: once upon a time it might have seemed important. Now, it simply did not matter.

Wynnington Temple looked puzzled. "I believe you've lost your heart to someone else," he said. Not that he believed it for a moment. But he wanted to hear her answer.

Marina was experiencing a sense of panic: Miles was paying his bill: would he walk past their table, or go out by another door? He had sat with his back to her the whole evening, a piece of delicacy she was quick to appreciate. He had not watched her, but he had been there. And now he was going. Why had he come if he had no intention of helping her? She turned frightened eyes to Wynnington Temple. "I'm not in love with anyone," she said. The truth, once out, relieved and startled her. She saw at once that he did not believe it.

"You're in love with me," he affirmed.

It had been true for so long: was it still true? She looked at him uncertainly.

"Good evening, Marina."

"Oh—oh, good evening." She half rose, hardly knowing

what she was doing, as Miles stood beside her. Then she sat down again, and glanced apologetically at the imperturbable actor who had resumed his cigar. "Mr. Temple, you've met Miles Rodwell?"

"Of course I have." He was affability itself, sending a waiter for a chair, and making the embarrassed young man sit down. "This is delightful," he went on. "I hope your young pupil's better. All this sunshine ought to be doing him some good. My wife tells me she's been hearing better accounts of him. Directly he's fit you must get him to come over to our place. It's a regular sun-trap."

"Thank you," muttered Miles.

"If he's fond of flowers he'll take an interest in my wife's new rose-trees. She enjoys showing them to people. She's an extremely able gardener."

Marina reflected that Mr. Temple was not in the habit of mentioning Mrs. Temple so often. She glanced at Miles to see how he was taking it, but the young man was staring at the famous profile, and she could not help wondering if he were still longing to punch it. Since he had not heard the actor's previous conversation, he really had little to complain of; no one was behaving less like the professional seducer than Wynnington Temple. In fact, he seemed the only member of the trio who was acquitting himself with ease and—it must be admitted—good manners. He looked benevolent and even amused.

And Marina came to the conclusion that these twin conditions were perfectly possible in Mr. Temple. It was conceivable that he really did feel kindly to herself and Miles, and even sorry for their crudity.

It all came down to the same thing in the long run: he was taking nothing seriously, not because he had a remarkable sense of humour, but rather because he was never quite genuine, quite real. Always he was acting, always fulfilling a certain rôle. He could not afford to be natural. His whole

reputation depended on the reverse. And that was all there was to it. Or nearly all. There remained Miles's view. And that was a much more simple business. He regarded the whole thing as the usual ugly affair of an elderly married man's designs on a romantic and vulnerable girl. It apparently never occurred to him that elderly married men were sometimes too indolent, and often too bored, to carry their casual desires into practice.

It all made Marina feel extremely foolish. She found it very irksome to sit still listening to Mr. Temple's flow of agreeable conversation. She was grateful for Miles's company, but she found it exhausting. She had one wish and one only—to be away from the pair of them. But the alternative was her lonely little bedroom in that silent hostel. And she thought longingly of her home, and the view of the fruit trees from her own window and the great width of sky beyond.

'I've got to get back,' she thought, 'I simply must. I don't care if I do look a fool.'

"Well," Wynnington Temple was saying, "and what do you think of this young woman's claims to be an actress?"

"I haven't seen her show," returned Miles, "and I don't want to. In my opinion Marina is not cut out for stage life."

"It's a point of view which she apparently shares." The actor was still obstinately amiable. "Incidentally, I should simply hate to tell you how many girls have come to me, after a trial run of six months or so in the chorus, declaring just the same thing. But, as I've been telling Marina, she must expect difficulties and learn to put up with hardship. Nothing worth having is won easily."

Marina blinked. That sounded very well: she did not remember Mr. Temple putting it quite like that, but it was true that the gist of all his lectures had been concerned with the necessity for endurance. And she looked hastily at Miles to see if he were impressed.

The young man was gnawing his upper lip and looking impatient. "I don't know that I altogether agree with you," he said. "Obviously no one can hope to avoid difficulty in any walk of life, but I refuse to regard unhappiness as a good. My impression is that it ought, if possible, to be avoided. And I personally approve of Marina's decision to give up the stage."

"I don't know that I've actually decided to do it, Miles. I'm more or less thinking it over."

Wynnington Temple chuckled. "Don't you believe her, Rodwell. Her mind's made up. Well, as I say, I think it's a pity, but then, I belong to the older generation which is invariably in the wrong."

"Quite," said Miles before Marina had time to frame a pretty speech.

The actor sat back in his chair, beaming upon them with extreme benevolence. He had changed his rôle and was determinedly avuncular. They were not going to be any trouble to him, and therefore he could afford to be gaily charitable.

"I'm glad to have the opportunity of discussing the matter with you," he told Miles; "one of Marina's own contemporaries is more likely to have something illuminating to say about the whole matter than people of my age or her father's. You youngsters know very clearly what you want and why. Now, what would you recommend that Marina should do?"

"Oh, Miles wants me to learn housewifery," she declared, "and to go back to the classes I ran away from."

"Let him speak for himself," demanded Wynnington Temple. "Don't take the words out of his mouth."

Miles was polishing his glasses, slowly and thoroughly: he did not enjoy this kind of treatment, and seemed completely nonplussed at the actor's geniality.

"I'm, I suppose, old-fashioned," he began. "I'm afraid I

don't care very much for extreme sophistication and all the rest of it. And I'm not particularly impressed by women's rather feverish attempts at independence."

Wynnington Temple looked at him with admiration. "What a first-class schoolmaster you will make!" he said.

Miles resumed his spectacles, and was surprised to observe that Marina's colour was high.

"As a matter of fact," she was saying, "I think he's perfectly right."

Mr. Temple patted her wrist. "Well, so long as he confines himself to the particular, rather than the general, so do I." And he glanced at his watch. "Look here, Marina, if you'll forgive me I'm going to ask this young man of yours to see you home. My visit to the States makes every moment of my time uncommonly precious, and I'm supposed to be meeting my agent at his club before eleven to-night. You see, my dear, even when you get to my time of life, there's no easing off; once an artist, one is ever at the mercy of one's public." He held out his hand.

The young people got up hastily: it was only too obvious that they were dismissed. The thing was done with so brazen an air as to appear perfectly permissible. His patronage was almost tender. He might, of course, have risen from his chair as they said good-bye, but after all he had just been stressing the burden of his years. It was wholly in keeping with an extremely able performance.

"In my opinion," said Miles furiously as they got outside, "he's been 'dining'."

Marina shook her head. "No. Truth to tell, he drinks very little. If it hadn't happened to us, the whole thing would have been rather funny."

"I'm sorry. I don't see it."

"Well, he held none of the cards and he bluffed quite gloriously. He *is* attractive, you know."

"You think so?"

"In a detached sort of way. Public people are exciting, Miles."

"More so than private ones, I gather."

She slid a hand under his arm. "No: less so."

"I'm glad to hear it," he returned, as he led the way down the dark side street with the dim-lighted windows of the little foreign restaurants on either side. "By the way, were you surprised to see me?"

"I couldn't believe my eyes. I must say, I was terribly glad, Miles."

"You were? Well, you practically asked me to come."

"But I never thought you'd do it."

"I couldn't do it often. I ordered the cheapest items on the menu, and the dinner cost me more than my train fare."

"Oh, Miles, I'm so sorry."

"Are you?"

She dropped his arm. "I don't know what you're so cross about."

"Because," he said angrily, "I feel a fool, and so, by rights, ought you. The whole incident was extremely gauche. I can only assume that he'd asked you out to dinner in the hope of persuading you to go home with him, and yet there the three of us sat, to all outward appearances on the best of terms. I confess I was longing all the time to push his face in, and yet I was smoking his cigarettes. I wish to goodness, Marina, you wouldn't involve me in these unnecessary incidents."

She stood still at the street corner. "You needn't have come," she said. "I didn't use any persuasion."

"I had to come," he answered severely, "because the plain truth is I'm in love with you. It's been going on for a considerable time, as a matter of fact. I don't suppose for a second the fact interests you, but there it is."

"It does 'interest' me," she said, "and I think it's high

time you stopped scolding me. I—I suppose I don't know very much about love . . .”

“That's only too apparent. Why you had to lose your head over that fellow baffles me entirely.” But he took her hand and replaced it under his arm.

“He's very grand,” she explained, “and I liked being noticed. That's what started it. It all seemed so tremendously romantic.”

“It would. I gather, in fact, that it always does when the man's got a wife and is nearing his dotage. How d'you feel about it now?”

“I feel an ass,” she said sadly. “I pictured a sort of grand renunciation scene—having grown famous in the meanwhile myself—but I discovered that he pictured something quite different, and that even that bored him a little. Don't jeer at me too much, Miles: I'm jeering at myself quite sufficiently.”

“Good heavens,” he said impatiently, “you're always misunderstanding me. It's wilful of you, Marina, it really is. Is it likely I'd jeer at you? I tell you I'm in love with you.”

“All right, dear, but don't bawl.”

“I wasn't bawling. Don't keep on saying that. I can't marry a repetitive wife.”

She laughed and drew closer to him. “Well, no one in London knows us even if all London *has* heard the young man declare himself. Ah! don't go on being cross, Miles. Be agreeable for once in a way.”

“Agreeable,” he repeated, “when I wish I had kicked that fellow all round Soho? You heard what he said—that I'll make an excellent schoolmaster? *That* wasn't intended as a compliment.”

“Who cares? I think you'll make a charming schoolmaster.”

“I shall earn about sixpence a year, and spend long impoverished holidays coaching little boys to pass the

Common Entrance. I suppose to some people the prospect would seem entirely frightful. But it's a good life, really. And in the end it's quite likely one might get a House."

"In the end?"

"Well, I mean about twenty years hence. I should be forty-five then: quite a suitable age for a housemaster. It's as well to take long views."

"Yes," said Marina faintly.

"It's not as though I had no future."

She looked at him in some perplexity. "With whom are you arguing?"

"Your father. At least, I'm trying to anticipate his objections. Of course you're too young. When will you be eighteen, Marina?"

"Ten months hence. But look here, what's Father got to do with it? You're getting over the ground too quickly."

"I've told you how I feel," he objected indignantly.

"You certainly have, and I've explained that I don't know enough about love—especially after so recently having made such a fool of myself—to say whether I care for you sufficiently or not."

"Oh you do," he returned with confidence, "I'm not worrying about that at all. Besides, you'll learn: you've got a good deal to learn, Marina, and I shall be happy to teach you."

"That's very handsome of you." She skipped as she walked, caught a shadow of disapproval on his face, and adopted a more stately progress. "I shall make a queer sort of wife for an usher," she said.

"Not at all."

She glanced at his set profile and sighed. "Understatement is your forte, isn't it?"

"Damnation take it!" spluttered Miles, forgetful once more of her injunction not to bawl. "What do you expect me to do or say in the open street? It's just like you to have put

me into an impossible position. That blasted dinner has taken all the spare cash I might otherwise have spent on a taxi-cab for the pair of us. I love you to blazes, but I flatly refuse to say so until I can have the chance of making it seem convincing—— *Now*, what the devil are you laughing at?”

“Nothing,” said Marina happily, “dearest Miles, nothing at all. Please, please go on completing my education. I feel that I am making the most rapid strides every minute.” In fact she was conscious of speaking the truth. That other affair had not been love at all, but this most likely was the genuine thing. If so, how queer! For it was uncertain, fluctuating, inclining to grow deeper, and seemingly made up of merriment, sincerity, and hopefulness in equal parts.

She could hardly believe that only a few minutes ago she had found his company exhausting, and actually persuaded herself that she preferred the view from her bedroom window. Now the recognition that they had soon to part, if only for a time, was fraught with pain.

‘This is real,’ declared Marina, ‘comic, pitiful, absurd and real. How much more I know than Rosita.’

21

“*THERE*,” sighed Rosita blissfully. She looked round the room with palpable delight. Nothing could have been better: the whole place was completely transformed. Now there was no mistaking the atmosphere: it was as superbly and unmistakably English as a drawing-room at the Hay-market Theatre.

The floral chintz was flowered and frilled, there was an herbaceous border to the dove-grey carpet, the walls were the colour of iris and the pictures, tactfully of the school of Turner, were framed in dull silver.

Upstairs in the loft, neatly wrapped in brown paper, were those tapestries, those South American shawls; the Chinese prints were firmly boxed, the brass bowl was shrouded, the antique weapons hidden away. No doubt of it, Rosita had worked very hard indeed. And, æsthetic pleasure apart, she had been most thankful for the work. Here at least she could plan and see results achieved.

Elsewhere, she reviewed the past year and was not encouraged. The children were doing well, but not through her agency. Therefore, it was difficult to feel more than a dutiful pride.

Aldous, for example, had won golden opinions at the art school: there was even talk of his holding a one-man show in London. He had not apparently forgotten Dan Greenway's hens, but it seemed that he rated Dan's niece more highly. It was all very estimable and strenuous, but Rosita had the uncomfortable feeling of not belonging to the scene. It indeed appeared only too plainly that Aldous could do perfectly well without her.

He had achieved, or was on the way to achieving, all that she expected of him, but it was not because she had spurred him on. The trick had been done by a thin young girl with fair woolly hair and an uncompromising pair of blue eyes.

'Not even pretty,' sighed Rosita; 'in fact, quite definitely *odd!*'

As for Benedict, Oxford had swallowed him whole. He seldom wrote home, and when he did he was concerned entirely with poetry, politics and the prospect of his degree. His references to the future were calm and certain. "When," he wrote, "I am firmly established in Fleet Street . . ."

No one could have been more self-centred. He might easily have lacked a stepmother for all the mention he made of her. He gave no signs of being sent down, or of annoying his father. Even his politics were no longer aggressive,* since he had discovered, on enquiry, that most of his

contemporaries thought as he did. If he mentioned the subject to Godfrey, it was almost pityingly. "Your obsolete Liberalism," he would say, with a very forgiving air. And now and again he would offer to lend Rosita books by pundits under the age of twenty-five.

But, on the whole, he was indulgent and left them alone. He could quite believe that they preferred it.

'One must never,' pondered Rosita, '*judge* these young people, of course, but one cannot help thinking that in our day we were distinctly more considerate. It gave her a little shock to think like that. 'Our day' and 'young people'. Had she really come to that? She had. She was still on the subtle side of forty-five, but emphatically she had a date to her. This lack of mental flexibility, this difficulty in adjustment, what was it but a part of the advance into uncompromising middle age?

Disappointments still accrued. They were different from the shattering disillusionments of youth, which invariably carried outraged surprise with them. Disappointment in middle life, decided Rosita sadly, was in the nature of inexorable confirmation.

There was Hugh, by way of example. She had seemed to be so successful with him: had she not contrived to give him what he asked for? Yet he had not wanted it. They called that kind of conduct psychological nowadays, but they had a plainer word for it once.

And then there was Marina. In a way she was the most irritating of the quartette. All on her own she had got round Godfrey, gone to London, attempted the stage, found it uncongenial, thrown up her work, and returned to announce herself engaged to Miles Rodwell.

The end was probably desirable, but the means all wrong. Having travelled to the capital, she should properly have fallen into one at least of the many pitfalls awaiting her, and urgently required the presence of a mother.

Having been rescued, in the nick of time, she should have been brought back to the country, and, under the maternal eye, encouraged to take an interest in the excellent young tutor.

But Marina had not obliged. She had somehow eluded the pitfalls and done without the maternal care. And she and Miles had achieved their love-making without assistance.

Small wonder that Rosita preferred her drawing-room to her stepchildren.

Here was something she could manage, something with which she did not have to compete. For she would not admit, perhaps she hardly realised, that competition had been the hardest part. For it had been the young Rosita and not the middle-aged Rosita who had competed. It was the ardent, rather unhappy girl of the past, jealously demanding that circumstance, which had shaped her, should also fashion Aldous, Benedict and the others.

And it had seemed unequal, so queerly unfair to see circumstance routed. How strong they were, these serious, obstinate, courageous children! She was afraid of them. They were not like herself, and she preferred her own type. How she had been ruled by her father and brother, how determined by fate! Surely it was estimable? And now she had her reward, in Godfrey, the new chintz, the iris silk cushions.

But the young people were also rewarded: already they were reaping their benefits and surely it was much too soon? Because, if not, it was difficult to see the moral. Rosita was certain there ought always to be a moral: it made everything so much more reasonable if one could recognise it immediately. It was a pity that life was so seldom as orderly as one could wish. There was this business of the new cook's departure, for example, and the fear of the parlour-maid growing in consequence unsettled. How unsymmetrical servants caused one's life to become! And still

there remained the problem of Punchinello, who continued to occupy a corner of the bedroom and to chase cats in his sleep. It was only a little thing, but how destructive to the perfect serenity of one's night-life!

'Bewildering!' sighed poor Rosita.

"Well, dearest?"

She sprang up as Godfrey entered the room. "Oh, I was just waiting for you. Look, it's absolutely finished. Could anything be more charming? I even managed to get silver picture cord. Tell me you think it the most delicious drawing-room you ever saw in your life."

He slipped an arm round her waist and, drawing her close, kissed her hair. "It's charming, my darling, and does you infinite credit. Now take me round, and show me what exactly we didn't have before."

THE END

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